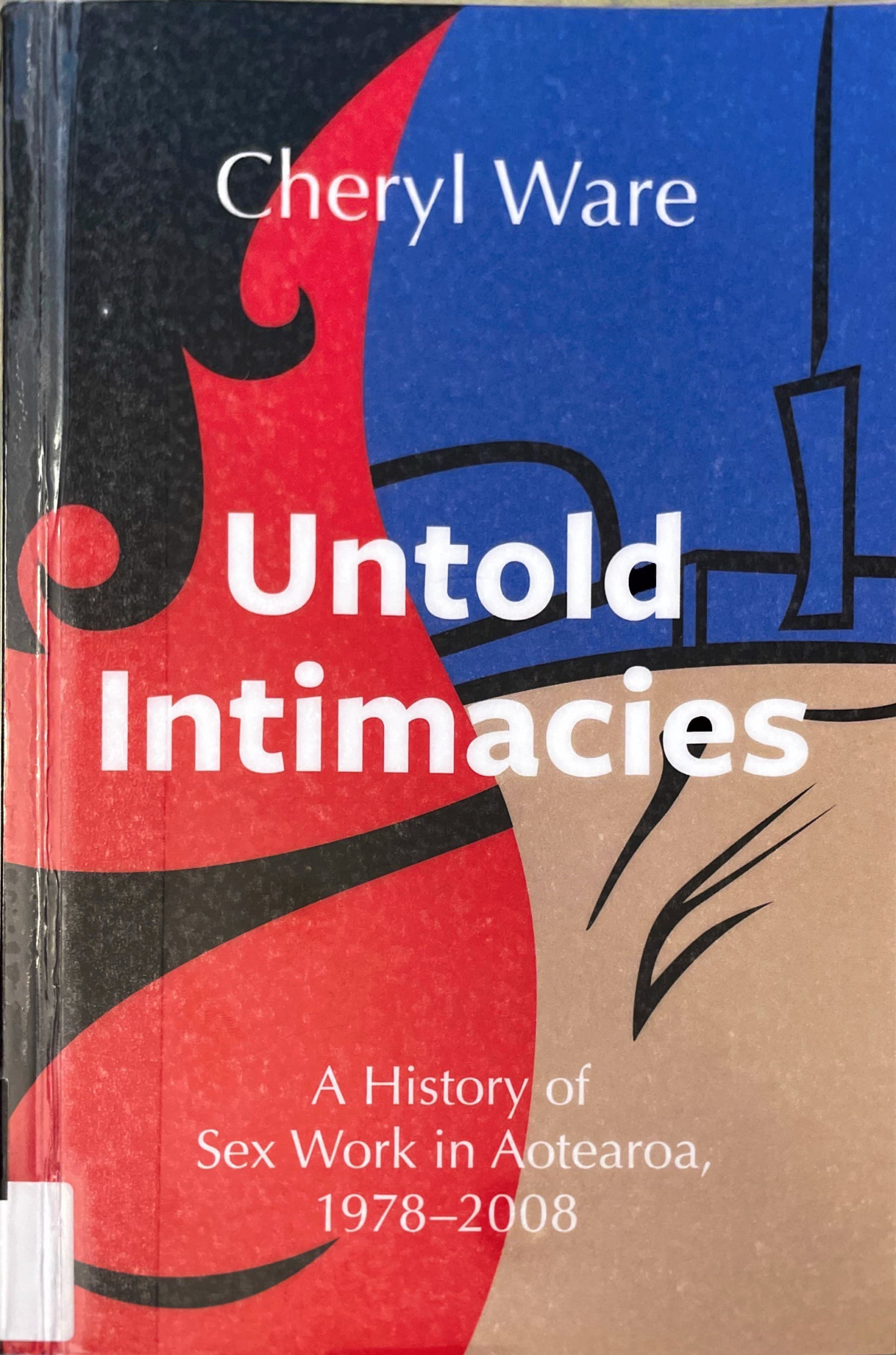
Cheryl Ware
Untold Intimacies
A History of
Sex Work in Aotearoa,
1978–2008

'This is a great book that straddles the fields of gender, sexuality, legal and social histories. It could have significant international appeal as histories of sex work are few and far between. International scholars will be able to look to *Untold Intimacies* as a key foundational reference.'

— Professor Noah Riseman, author of *Transgender Australia: A History Since 1910*

'*Untold Intimacies* makes a significant contribution to New Zealand historical writing as well as the global literature on sex work. It will take its place as a significant intervention in the scholarship on the history of prostitution, sexuality, policing, violence, gender and women.'

— Professor Frank Bongiorno, Australian National University

'This book provides a valuable contribution to scholarship in documenting the oral histories of sex workers in Aotearoa in the period 1978–2008. It offers excellent insight into this period of history that readers will learn a lot from. The storytelling is compelling and creates a sense for the reader of 'getting to know' participants. The stories feel authentic and are told in a way that unpacks the complexities and contradictions of the lives and experiences of its protagonists.'

— Associate Professor Lynzi Armstrong, Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington

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A History of Sex Work in Aotearoa, 1978–2008

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Introduction

In February 2004, Dani was thirty-one and had spent the previous fifteen years working in various corporate roles in Auckland. She had considered starting sex work several times, and 'the opportunity kind of presented itself'. She was single for the first time in several years, 'which is the only way I would have chosen to start', and needed a change. She was ready to 'give it a go'. Dani explained:

> I had been given a verbal warning at my work for something that I didn't think was that major. And I basically threw my toys out of the cot [laughs]. I'd been working in HR for many years, and I didn't think it was warranted and I marched out. . . . So, I was looking in the paper for advertisements for work, and as I was looking through these HR or secretarial roles, I saw all these advertisements that said 'Ladies, ladies, ladies!' And I thought, Ooh [clasps hands], how cool would that be! Given that I had stormed out of my work for the first time in my life, and that I had thought about it for many years. I thought, Oh my gosh, *imagine*.

Dani's final push into the sex industry came the very next morning. She completed an interview for a secretarial position but found the process 'very degrading because I'd been recruiting some pretty high-level people for massive projects. And suddenly I was doing grammar and typing tests.' Feeling disillusioned with the prospect of 'going back to the start', she drove home via a large massage parlour in central Auckland:

> I decided to go past a place called Femme Fatale and I thought, Well, I know where it is, and there's usually two car parks directly underneath that the management park in. I thought, I'll drive past, and if there's a car park available, then I'll drive in, and I'll walk in and see what the deal is. And if there are no car parks available, then that option's not an option. Anyway, I drove through and both car parks were available.

Still dressed in her conservative interview attire, Dani entered the parlour, met the manager, and was invited to start work the next day. She recalled, 'I loved it. Absolutely loved it. And I've never looked back.' Dani had found her calling. She concluded: 'I've definitely found what I want to do. And I essentially chose it as a career.'

Dani's introduction to the sex industry was not without issues. Despite parlour operators being legally required to provide sexual health information to their employees, she did not receive any advice about using condoms or other safe sex products. She was simply given a quick tour of the bar, shown her locker, and then 'you are left entirely to your own devices'. The issues caused by the lack of an orientation perhaps paled in comparison to the prejudice Dani faced as a sex worker. Open about her work from the outset, she remembered that the hardest part was 'opening up to my family. I did, and they didn't react very well.' Dani was ostracised by her 'very Catholic' parents, siblings, and extended family for nearly a decade. She was also careful to protect her child from others' potentially negative reactions to her new job. She explained: 'The only place I did create an illusion was for my son's school, I never wanted that to impact on my son's life. So, I told the school that I still worked as a contractor, and that was never questioned.'

Eight months earlier, in June 2003, New Zealand had become the first country to decriminalise soliciting, brothel-keeping and living off the earnings of sex work on a national level with the Prostitution Reform Act. The law change recognised sex work as work. It propelled New Zealand's sex industry onto the international stage. Human rights organisations, including Amnesty International and the United Nations, lauded the 'New Zealand model' whereby sex work is decriminalised and workers are protected under employment legislation.

The ability of people like Dani to work without the risk of being arrested is a testament to the achievements of those who dedicated themselves to protecting sex workers' rights and safety. In the decades leading up to law

reform, sex workers fought to survive in an industry that was criminalised and pushed to the margins of society. They rejected claims that sex work was wrong and asserted themselves as informed and responsible citizens engaged in a legitimate profession. In recent years, social scientists and public health researchers have taken the lead in exploring the development of sex work activism in Aotearoa.[1] The intimate lived experiences of the individuals directly responsible for and affected by New Zealand's pioneering sex work legislation have received less attention. These individuals are at the heart of this book.

Drawing on new and archived interviews, *Untold Intimacies* focuses primarily on the critical years from the regulation of brothels with the Massage Parlours Act of 1978 to the legally mandated national review of decriminalisation by the Prostitution Law Review Committee in 2008. The late twentieth century witnessed increasingly open discussions about sex and sexuality following the more liberal 1960s, the increasing availability of the contraceptive pill, and the social movements of that era. These movements, most notably women's liberation and the gay rights movement, disrupted the 'happy families façade' of postwar New Zealand, and brought attention to the double standard of laws that criminalised sex workers but not their predominantly male clientele.[2] Through the narrators' voices, this book reveals both the increasing visibility and unity of a national network of sex workers and the tensions that emerged as sex workers fought for financial, physical and emotional safety during an era of social and political upheaval. It sheds new light on how public international debates about decriminalisation, challenging stigma and protecting sex workers' human rights resonated with some of the individuals at the centre of these discussions.

The following chapters invite readers into the intimate lives of twenty-five individuals who started sex work inadvertently, to meet short-term financial or personal goals, or as a career that sometimes spanned several decades. They worked in massage parlours, from the streets, on the ships, as escorts, and as private operators from their homes or separate apartments while advertising their services in local newspapers. Most interviewees worked in more than one of these settings, each of which offered varying levels of independence, flexibility, community and earning potential. The oral histories reveal how these individuals made a living at a time when most elements of sex work were outlawed, and an arrest could be financially devastating and socially ruinous. They offer first-hand accounts of how workers negotiated their relationships with peers, employers, clients, police, and the wider public.

Most of the actions and events this book covers took place at a time when soliciting, brothel-keeping and living off the earnings of sex work were outlawed across the country. The impact such laws had on the lives of sex workers cannot be overstated. Even in situations when sex workers appeared to receive endorsement from the police and the government – for example, with the Department of Health financing the New Zealand Prostitutes' Collective's national response to HIV and AIDS – they remained vulnerable to individual police officers' interpretations of the law, and to employers and clients who were aware of the workers' criminalised status. By positioning sex workers as criminals, the law reinforced public stereotypes that sex workers were less deserving of respect and protection than those outside of the industry – although, as this book reveals, sex workers continue to face prejudice after decriminalisation.

Many of the narrators in this book spoke openly about the struggles associated with sex work, yet these are only part of the story. Across the interviews, narrators emphasised finding an unparalleled level of community solidarity among their peers. Whakawāhine, fa'afafine and other trans and gender diverse individuals, particularly those of Māori and Pacific descent, gravitated towards the streets of central Auckland and Wellington in the 1970s and 1980s to find others with whom they could explore and embrace their genders and sexualities. Their testimonies offer insights into a culture that has since shifted amidst rising competition for less pay, more demanding clients, and people moving into private, independent work in the years following decriminalisation. By uncovering this history, *Untold Intimacies* may prove to be of interest to people who have worked or who currently work in the sex industry in Aotearoa and elsewhere. A historical reading of sex work can perhaps provide further context to some of your experiences and offer space to locate your voices as part of a collective.

Whether in parlours, on the streets or on ships – and in the face of public outcry and police scrutiny – many narrators approached sex work as a profession where they sought financial security and opportunities for personal and professional growth. They developed lasting friendships and formed a united front in pursuit of legislative and social change. Their personal memories and private reflections offer insights into the complexities of working in an industry that is simultaneously so visible and so hidden.

The book ahead

This book is structured around key themes that emerged across the interviews. Each chapter engages with a selection of oral histories, locates the testimonies in their broader historical context, and traces connections and divergences among them. In doing so, I aim to capture the complexity of how people experienced, remembered and articulated their involvement in sex work during these critical years.

The first chapter highlights how narrators navigated their interactions with police and the criminal justice system amidst inequitable laws that disproportionately affected those in more visible parts of the industry. The book then moves on to trace the increasing unity and visibility of sex workers across the late twentieth century with the formation of the New Zealand Prostitutes' Collective (NZPC) in 1987, the less visible side of community building through informal networks and mentorship, evolving public ideas about consent and body autonomy across the late twentieth century, and the increasing recognition of sex work as a professional endeavour with the international sex workers' rights movement from the late 1970s.

Untold Intimacies then shifts the focus to explore sex workers' sexual health activism during the height of the HIV and AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s. It highlights the tensions whereby the government funded the newly established NZPC to develop a national response to the crisis at a time when most elements of sex work were outlawed across the country, and when sex workers' safe sex initiatives were undermined by police who seized condoms and safe sex literature as evidence of soliciting offences. Chapter Seven examines the passage of the Prostitution Reform Bill in June 2003. It recasts narratives of decriminalisation from a celebration of national progressiveness to a focus on the unpaid and often unseen labour many dedicated to campaigning for law reform over nearly two decades. Chapter Eight concludes the book by engaging with the narrators' reflections on undertaking sex work. Public stereotypes that victimise sex workers or belittle their choices are often in direct contrast to how people remember their time in the industry. Some of those involved in radical lesbian feminist networks during the sex wars of the 1970s and 1980s, for example, described sex work as an expression of their feminism. Such insights are important in appreciating the validity of sex work, the agency of those who work in the industry, and the complexity of individual experience.

Sex workers' memories and reflections of their lives and work offer rich and otherwise unattainable insights into how they transformed New Zealand's social and political landscape across the late twentieth century. Sex workers are certainly not a homogenous population. Individuals who work or have worked in the industry had varying and often contrasting motivations, priorities and reflections. This book celebrates the individual subjectivity inherent in oral testimonies. It aims to add nuance and depth to understandings of sex work through the voices of those who generously shared their intimate memories and personal reflections of working during these highly controversial and transformative decades.

CHAPTER ONE

Working Outside the Law

By 1977, Shareda had been working on the streets of Auckland for two years. The fifteen-year-old had found her place in a community of whakawāhine (Māori trans women) workers who attracted clients from the top of Queen Street. These women were 'beautiful, kind, and *very* protective' of their youngest colleague. They warned her to avoid being arrested, especially by the wharf police, and to take cover at the sight of a Holden Kingswood, the identifiable vehicle officers used at the time.[1] Shareda soon discovered why:

> The time in Auckland, yeah it was scary. I did get arrested once. I did get caught because I walked away. They told me not to, but I walked away from the girls. Even two years later they were still as protective as when they first saw you. And they're still giving you the same message: 'Stay where we can see you.' But no, I wandered off. Ugh, next thing this Kingswood pulls up. And I remember all I could hear was, 'What the eff are you?' And I'm like, 'Pardon?' Ah, next thing two big policemen jumped out, shoved me in the car, squashed between them. I remember they were huge! And they took me to Auckland police station. And you know, they said, 'Where do you live? How old are you?' I told them I was twenty-two, which was a lie. And I was so scared I gave

> them my uncle's address. They were horrible. [The officers called Shareda's uncle and stated] 'Well, we've got him here. Is it true? Twenty-two?' And the cop's like this [whispers], 'You lied.' I'm like, Oh God, now I'm really gonna get it. Yeah so. . . . Oh, they stripped me, that's right. They stripped me. And they all stood around gawking, giggling. It was horrible. And I'm thinking, Well, this is what those other girls get.

The officers returned Shareda's clothes and led her to a cell for the evening. She noticed a pair of high-heeled shoes in the corridor outside the next cell, which indicated her neighbour was also a trans worker. She explained:

> And I remember sitting in there and then kind of waking up. And you know that sound – I don't know if you've ever heard that sound – like, if somebody's in another room and somebody slams somebody against the wall? You know, that constant [imitates banging] like somebody's being pushed against a wall. That's what was happening next door. From what I was told by the girls, you either got rolled up in a mattress and kicked or you got the phone book in the stomach. This is what the old girls talked about. And I remember that sound, I'll never forget that sound.

Shareda was charged with frequenting with a felonious intent and spent the following two weeks in Ōwairaka Boys' Home, a social welfare home in Auckland that would close in 1990 following reports of cruelty and inadequate living conditions.[2] She then returned to the flat she shared with other workers in central Auckland. At that point, one of the older women said, 'It's time for you to go.' They advised her to move to Wellington, where the police were known to be more humane in their dealings with sex workers.

Such harrowing experiences with police are a familiar memory to those who worked outside the law and without legal protection. This chapter examines some of the complex dynamics that operated between sex workers and police and, more broadly, the criminal justice system before and immediately after decriminalisation. While scholars have cited low conviction rates for soliciting to argue the police were more 'relaxed' in their dealings with sex workers from the 1970s, this oral history reveals a more complex story.[3] Across the interviews, narrators shared painful

memories of facing entrapment, physical violence and harassment at the hands of police. The distress these events caused was amplified by the police's authoritative position. Workers were less likely to trust the police when they needed support, and developed initiatives to protect one another, assuming the police would fail them. Taken together, narrators' memories of being arrested and interrogated by police offer deeper insight into how their lives were affected by legislation that deemed sex workers to be criminals. Their testimonies reveal the prejudice they faced from the law, the police, the judiciary and the wider public, which prevented them from being able to do their jobs safely or seek justice when they were harmed.

Setting the scene

New Zealand's sex industry came to national attention in the 1970s with the proliferation of strip clubs and massage parlours in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch.[4] The massage parlour business was 'booming' in the United States by the early 1970s and had achieved similar success in Australia.[5] Parlour managers typically employed women as masseuses – with the occasional male masseur – and charged patrons an entry fee for the massage. It was then the responsibility of the masseuse and the client to negotiate sexual services, known as 'extras', and their fees in the room. The clandestine nature of these illicit extras enabled the parlour operators to deny that sex work took place on the premises. Under this arrangement, parlour managers bypassed laws that prohibited brothel-keeping, living on the earnings of sex work or procuring another person for sex work, as set out in Sections 147 to 149 of the Crimes Act (1961).[6] On occasions when a patron did not want – or did not want to pay for – extras, the worker remained unpaid for the time they had spent massaging and conversing with them.

National MP David Thomson, as minister of justice, introduced the Massage Parlours Bill in December 1977. He reported concerns from police and the public that many of the estimated one hundred 'so-called massage parlours in our cities are merely fronts for people seeking to make a living from prostitution and drugs'.[7] Additionally, 'the way in which some of these establishments are run often makes it difficult, if not impossible, for the police to obtain sufficient evidence that criminal offences are occurring'.[8] Thomson introduced the Bill ostensibly with the primary aim of preventing organised crime. As this book shows, however, the law – and especially the way it was enforced – was laden with gender and racial bias. Individual parlour

employees faced entrapment by police and exploitation from managers who implemented fines and withheld payments with the knowledge that workers had no legal rights to challenge them. If convicted of soliciting, many parlour workers were forced to work on the street, in a scene with which they were less familiar, where they felt less comfortable and faced greater risks. Further, an arrest for sex work could reveal an individual's occupation to their family and friends against their wishes, while a conviction could affect an individual's custody rights, limit their future employment prospects, and prevent them from securing financial loans or travelling overseas.[9]

The Massage Parlours Act came into law on 9 August 1978. It introduced a licensing system that required all parlours to hold an annual court-approved licence, and all operators to obtain an annual certificate of approval to manage the premises. Parlour operators were also required to maintain a list of their employees to confirm none were under the age of eighteen or had received a soliciting or drug-related conviction in the past ten years.[10] At the same time, the Act increased the police's power by allowing them to view and potentially object to each application for a parlour licence (prospective operators were required to send their applications to the police and the court closest to their proposed business), and to enter and inspect any premises without a search warrant. In this regard, the Act essentially classified massage parlours as public spaces. It meant that laws that prohibited soliciting in public were extended to these indoor venues.[11] In practice, the Massage Parlours Act empowered police to masquerade as clients and later return to arrest the worker for soliciting if they had (and allegedly sometimes even if they had not) offered extras. It reinforced ideas that sex work was not a legitimate occupation and placed police in the position of punishers rather than protectors.[12]

Massage parlour workers were certainly not alone in being actively policed across this period. Street-based sex workers have historically received the most negative attention from police and the public. Their visibility, coupled with depictions of street-based workers as 'a public nuisance, representing a threat to social order and morality', meant they were especially targeted by police.[13] For trans workers, and Māori or Pacific individuals, such hostility was amplified by transphobia and racism. Street-based workers became more visible in the 1960s and 1970s, with increasing numbers of trans, whakawāhine and fa'afafine individuals – as well as a few cisgender women – working on the streets of the main cities. These included Vivian Street and Marion Street in central Wellington, Karangahape Road and Customs Street

in Auckland, and Manchester Street and Latimer Square in Christchurch.[14] After negotiating the service and their fee, street-based workers often either accepted rides from clients or accompanied them on foot to more secluded public areas, the client's home, or a hotel or motel room.

When intercepted by police, workers were arrested under a series of gender-specific charges. Under the Police Offences Act 1927, cisgender women – to whom laws against soliciting exclusively applied – were arrested for loitering in public 'for the purposes of prostitution' and faced either a fine or up to one month in prison. Trans and gender diverse workers were arrested under the same Act for frequenting public places with the intent to commit a crime, which carried a maximum penalty of one year imprisonment.[15] This remained the case until the Summary Offences Act 1981 extended the soliciting laws to prohibit 'any person' from doing so in a public place, with a fine of up to $200.[16]

It is here that laws that prohibited sex work intersected with laws against same-sex relations. Sex between men was initially outlawed under the English Laws Act of 1858, which ruled that all laws in force in England on 14 January 1840 also applied to New Zealand. While the Crimes Act of 1961 reduced the penalties for sex between men from life imprisonment to a maximum of ten years, these sexual acts remained illegal until the Homosexual Law Reform Act 1986.[17] If caught by police, male workers could be arrested and charged for loitering or indecency, for soliciting under the Summary Offences Act 1981, and for having sex with another man (until 1986).[18]

As others have identified, the criminal justice system misgendered trans women, which meant they could be arrested for the same charges as male workers.[19] Historian Will Hansen highlights a 1974 court case in Wellington where the proceedings focused on the defendant's genitalia to determine whether she could be charged with committing an indecent act on 'another male'. As Hansen argues, it was 'a humiliating and degrading process that relied on the medicalisation of trans identities'.[20]

Some street-based workers supplemented their income by working on the ships when they came into port. Across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, ports across Aotearoa acted as key sites of cultural exchange and sexual interaction between locals and the visiting seamen.[21] Oral histories with 'ship girls' captured their fond memories of working on ships with sailors from Scandinavia, Europe, the United Kingdom, Africa, the Americas and Asia in the 1950s and 1960s.[22] As Chapter Three outlines, tighter regulations and increased security on the ports meant ship work had declined by the time

most of the people in this book entered the industry.[23] Three interviewees, however, recounted being ship girls in the 1970s and very early 1980s. They often partnered with one sailor during their time in port, socialised with seamen on the ships or at local bars and parties, and sometimes travelled to reunite with their crew member in other parts of the country.

A volatile relationship with the police

While police had a duty to uphold the laws that prohibited soliciting, brothel-keeping and living off the earnings of sex work, individual officers in this period had considerable discretion in how they did so.[24] Vice squads led the enforcement of laws against sex work and other 'laws related to morality'. New Zealand's first vice squad – known as the anti-vice squad – was established briefly in Wellington in November 1942 to deal 'with the growing menace of vice in the city'.[25] The squads appear to have re-emerged nearly twenty years later in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch, and comprised one or two detectives within the Criminal Investigation Branch who took responsibility for policing gambling, sex work and indecent publications.[26] Yet the history of the vice squads remains shadowy. As journalist Julie Hill discovered in 2017, despite interviewing multiple officers who remembered being members of the vice squad, the New Zealand Police denied having any record that a vice squad existed.[27] The power these vice squads held echoed that of their overseas counterparts. In the Australian context, historian Raelene Frances argues that the law allowed police to exercise considerable individual judgement, 'once again increasing the scope for selective enforcement and police corruption'.[28] Published interviews with sex workers overseas suggest a more unlawful arrangement based on whether workers were willing to give police monetary bribes or perform sexual favours to avoid arrest.[29]

Not every contact with the police was negative. Several narrators remembered friendly encounters with officers who warned them about violent men and casually enquired about their evenings. The Wellington vice squad went further and initially publicly supported the NZPC in the late 1980s (as detailed in Chapter Two). For the most part, however, narrators' positive memories of police reflect their low expectations of law enforcement. Given that police would often hassle and humiliate them or their peers in public, workers could be caught off-guard by the kindness of some police they met, particularly in Wellington. Shareda remembered her first encounter with a police officer when she arrived in the capital city as

an eighteen-year-old: 'I tried to run, he goes, "What are you running for?" [laughs]. He goes, "I just asked how you were, how your night was. You're new here, aren't you?"' Yet Wellington workers still had good reason to be wary. Several interviewees attested to the city's sex industry being the most heavily policed in the country. Shareda was arrested six times during her tenure on the Wellington streets. She explained that the police:

> still had their tactics. Not like Auckland, theirs was different. We called it plucking. And this was when they would send an undercover officer out – actually two of them – and you'd get in the car. You could chat for ages, but as soon as you mentioned money, that was it. And somebody was listening on the radio so don't even try to deny it [laughs]. And I got caught about six times. But you had to be on the ball, because you'd look at a girl that's always standing on the corner and then one night she's not there. And you're like, Hmm. Maybe this is the night?

In a 1989 documentary, the two detectives who comprised the Wellington vice squad described this practice – using the pejorative 'tranny run' – to clear the streets 'for a few nights' in response to complaints from the public. These complaints usually occurred 'if there's somebody down from Auckland or something along those lines causing trouble on the street'.[30] Conversely, Shareda and others suspected police 'plucked' workers from the street to reach a quota for arrests and timed their operations to align with public holidays.[31]

Shareda was not alone in identifying police in Wellington as more compassionate in their dealings with sex workers, especially when compared with their Auckland-based colleagues. Several Wellington interviewees noted the kinder treatment from police, and their experiences of the city in general as a more accepting place for trans and whakawāhine individuals. They often attributed this to the activism and advocacy of trans icon, proprietor, former mayoral candidate and entertainer Carmen Rupe (1936–2011) and her contemporaries. These included businesswoman and community leader Chrissy Witoko (1944–2002), activist Dana de Milo (1946–2018) and former Labour MP Georgina Beyer (1957–2023). Shareda was delighted to see 'trans girls out in the *daytime*' who had secured 'straight' jobs in offices and call centres. Consequently, she 'never ever, ever, ever, wanted to go back to

Auckland. I just fell in love with Wellington. The people, actually. I was just surprised by how nice people were.'

While police in Wellington might be remembered in a more positive light than their Auckland-based colleagues, any friendliness between workers and police was precarious and could end abruptly when police decided to 'crack down'. Renee was especially cognisant of her vulnerability given the hostility with which police and members of the public treated trans workers on the streets of Wellington in the early 1980s. Renee's entry into the sex industry came shortly after she moved to Wellington from her home town in Hawke's Bay in 1979. She initially worked at the Slazenger sports equipment factory in Petone and received an offer to relocate with the company to Auckland. Renee opted to stay in Wellington. It was then that she 'changed [her] lifestyle' and started living openly as a woman. Renee gained a job at Club Exotique, a prominent strip club on the corner of Vivian and Cuba Streets, and simultaneously started sex work. She enjoyed the performative aspects of stripping and shared particularly fond memories of performing choreographed pieces to 'Big Spender' and 'New York, New York', and touring the country as a burlesque dancer. These experiences were 'really, really, cool, and it got us a new perspective on what we could do in life'. Renee was less comfortable with sex work, which she resorted to for survival: 'I had no job, no money. I didn't really want to go onto a benefit or anything, so I went out on the streets.'

Renee is perhaps one of the few trans street-based workers from her era who have never been arrested. She explained that 'we always got warned when the police were going to come out and do it. Someone always got word that they were going to do it on a certain weekend.' Renee heeded such warnings. On these occasions, 'I stuck to my regulars, the guys I knew. I just wouldn't go with any stranger whatsoever 'cause they could've been an undercover cop or something.' She remembered having friendly conversations with police whenever she encountered them on the street. Her positive memories perhaps reflected her relief that she did not experience the explicit abuse her peers faced from the police and members of the public:

> You know, a lot of the girls got stuff thrown at them. People tried to run them over, actually drive up on the footpath and chase them and try to hit them with their car, which was really scary. You had to be really alert. And the police were actually really good. I thought they were, anyway, because

> as long as you behaved yourself on the streets, they left you alone, but if you caused trouble, and you were abusive, and you were disrespectful to the public, they really picked on you. And I mean they would come out onto the streets, and they'd see the person and start calling them their butch name instead of their feminine name. And I'd go, 'Oh my God, thank God they don't do that to me.'

Sharing cordial interactions with police and being able to rely on them for help were two different matters. This was most clear when Renee described a client who tried to rape her at the top of Mount Victoria in the early 1980s. She escaped by sliding down the cliff and hiding in the bushes until the perpetrator left. Renee felt 'there was no use going to the police':

> They wouldn't do anything about it because of what we were. But we were actually taught that from some of the older queens. You just didn't approach the police when something like that happened to you because you didn't think you were going to get help.

Renee's emphasis on 'what we were' reflects both the transphobia and anti-sex-work prejudice that meant neither she nor her peers could access support from police or justice for crimes committed against them. As this chapter later outlines, cisgender women in the sex industry faced similar barriers to accessing help.

The pervasive threat of police brutality

Anti-sex-work legislation before 2003 made it difficult and dangerous to work in the sex industry. The oral histories reveal the physical, sexual and emotional violence certain police inflicted on workers. The 1970s and 1980s were a period typified by police brutality, such as the police terrorisation of Pacific families during the Dawn Raids of the 1970s, and their violence against Springbok tour protesters in 1981.[32] The mere sight of police triggered fear and panic among some sex workers that extended well beyond their concerns about being arrested.

The prevalence of violence at the hands of both the police and clients emerged in Shannon's testimony. As Chapter Five outlines in further depth,

Shannon simultaneously worked from the streets of downtown Auckland and on Japanese fishing boats from the age of fourteen in 1973 to the age of thirty in 1989. She stopped sex work to become a full-time caregiver for the final five years of her grandmother's life. With encouragement and financial support from her whānau, who 'didn't want me to go back into the world of drugs and crime', Shannon enrolled in a social work course through Te Whānau o Waipareira after her grandmother's passing. I approached Shannon in May 2021 after reading an article about her experiences with the vice squad.[33] In the 1970s and 1980s, Shannon was part of a group of young trans street-based workers who looked out for one another by working in teams and memorising clients' number plates to ensure the client could be identified if they turned violent. These initiatives were crucial considering there were 'a whole lot of bashings in our days'. She described attacks from clients as an inevitability: 'When you come back and you're all battered and beaten we'd take you to the police, and say, "Oh this car stopped and beat her up and then took off again." 'Cause you can't say she cracked it [undertook sex work] with him.'

It is perhaps surprising that Shannon could approach the police for help at all, especially considering police in Auckland had a reputation for being particularly ruthless towards trans street-based workers:

> The cops were really – especially at the wharf police station – they were terrible. They used to beat us up, and rob us, and rape us, and all sorts. It was just disgusting. And to look at them today, it's taken me around thirty years to get over them. And now I see them as humans and not so much as pigs. Although I do call them pigs now and then when I get angry. And these were police, these were the people that we used to look at to help us. That's where a lot of my aggression comes from towards the police, that was back then. Thirty years on, I still have that little tinge . . . but I met some new police officers and they're amazing, they're lovely, they're part of the rainbow community. If I can forgive, I think everybody else should be able to forgive.

Shannon's emphasis on forgiveness offers a glimpse into the complexities of remembering and talking about police brutality against sex workers given how these relationships have evolved, especially after decriminalisation.[34]

Shannon's testimony marks a clear shift from her understandable anger at police to her current appreciation that some police either openly identify as LGBT or are allies. Her emphasis on the kindness of newly qualified police officers might reflect her hope that police–civilian relations have transformed and that people no longer endure the treatment she and her peers experienced. It might also be a nod to the Auckland Pride Board's controversial decision to ban police marching in uniforms from the 2019 Pride Parade and the community's ongoing concerns about police abusing their power.

Shareda placed a similar emphasis on forgiveness. She acknowledged the retired police officers who attended the launch of *Poutokomanawa: The Carmen Rupe Generation*, an exhibition at the New Zealand Portrait Gallery in 2019. The exhibition honoured Carmen and her peers as, Shareda explained, 'our pou, the pillars of the community'. Shareda, who spoke at the launch, recalled: 'I said in my speech, "to all those policemen and policewomen, to all those that were nasty to us, that's the way it was back in those days and there are no hard feelings. And to all those that were good to us, I thank you."' Shareda's forgiveness perhaps reflects Carmen's influence. She explained that Carmen had invited two former vice squad detectives, Trevor Morley and Paul Fitzpatrick, to her seventieth birthday celebrations, where they presented her with a purple constable's helmet adorned with glitter and feathers.

While neither Shannon nor Shareda mentioned race as a factor in their arrests, the prejudicial treatment Māori sex workers endured from police is well documented. In September 1998, New Zealand Police and Te Puni Kōkiri Ministry of Māori Development released their commissioned report *Māori Perceptions of the Police*. The report featured numerous complaints of sexual abuse at the hands of police, which the Māori sex workers they interviewed attributed to being 'part of the job'.[35] Māori respondents within and outside of the industry also attested to being repeatedly stopped and searched when no crime was committed, and being beaten, illegally strip-searched and sexually abused by the predominantly Pākehā police force.[36] Consequently, respondents 'were unanimous in their perception that the police institution is a racist institution that perpetuates strong anti-Māori attitudes'.[37]

Although this chapter has so far focused on trans workers, cisgender workers also shared similar accounts of being arrested and persecuted.[38] Sue Forbes was particularly critical of the police's dealings with her friends both within and outside of the sex industry in the early 1980s. Sue spent most

of her childhood in Dunedin before her family moved to Wellington when she was thirteen. Her first exposure to the sex industry came during her teenage years when she accompanied an older friend to watch bands and drink at the Royal Oak Hotel and other venues that were popular among queens, ship girls and street-based workers. While she was often kicked out for being underage, she caught a glimpse of a very different side to the 'grey city, full of civil servants' she previously knew. Sue left school at the age of seventeen in 1979, having achieved School Certificate, and gained a job as a computer operator. She moved into a flat on The Terrace with friends from Wellington's punk rock scene the following year. Sue started sex work around the same time, when she responded to a 'staff wanted' sign on Willis Street for the Sultan's Tent massage parlour. As someone who 'wasn't particularly sexually experienced', she described the parlour as 'a good place to start in the industry' where 'you weren't pressured into doing anything'. She shared similarly positive memories of working at the House of Ladies parlour from 1982 to 1984 and likened the manager to 'a big brother I suppose. Always just supportive. If you didn't want to massage that person or whatever, he wouldn't let them in.'

While Sue had supportive managers and enjoyed camaraderie with her colleagues, she often declined clients' requests for sex 'because I really was terrified of being busted'. She was especially wary of having her name and soliciting offence published in the newspaper and 'bringing shame on the family'. Sue's concerns about entrapment were warranted. Several interviewees attested to police posing as clients in massage parlours and returning to arrest a masseuse if she had offered or simply agreed to extras.

Sue's adverse experiences before starting sex work amplified her discomfort with the police. She remembered police targeting the same addresses multiple times under the guise of searching for drugs and stolen property, 'regardless of who was living there'. Her flat on The Terrace was one of the homes they targeted:

> But it was a way of training the upcoming new lot of police . . . *men*, 'cause I never saw a policewoman, actually, they were always policemen. And it'd be stuff like they'd be pulling apart your tampons, and getting out your pill packet and saying, 'What's this?' It was really disgusting. . . . It was the same old usual suspects, usual places that they did for God knows how many years. And I don't think anyone had ever complained

> about it, we never complained about it, but you were subjected to being rudely awoken in the morning by these arrogant little probey policemen who were coming through being trained how to toss the place looking for drugs. But obviously, they didn't even know what a contraceptive packet looked like. It was stupid. So, I suppose there was that. Being exposed to that must have really also played into my paranoia about the police.

Sue described being raised with a sense of social justice and was propelled into political action from her experiences with police 'coming up and practising their "move, move, move" type stuff on innocent people who were just having a party. I suppose that caused us to become activists.' Sue's mention of 'move, move, move' is a reference to the chant of the Red Squad – the anti-protest police who have subsequently faced severe criticism for extreme violence during the Springbok tour protests – and captures her memories of the aggression with which officers raided her home.

Sue's testimony also draws attention to cases where police reportedly offered to abandon the soliciting charges if women pleaded guilty to drug possession. She explained:

> If the vice squad came in [to a massage parlour] and did a raid, and caught you doing something with someone, the first thing they would do would be go back to your house and search it for drugs. And they'd say, 'Plead guilty to the possession of cannabis or the possession of heroin charge, and we'll drop the soliciting.' But it still had the same effect, you still could not work in a massage parlour for ten years.

In April 1994, the editors of the NZPC's community magazine *Siren* cautioned readers to 'tell your flatmates to keep the house clean' to avoid being charged with possession of cannabis or other substances. They advised that 'it is easier for the police to get a drug conviction to stick rather than a soliciting charge'. While pleading guilty for possession of cannabis or other substances 'might seem like an easy out at the time', especially in comparison to a charge for soliciting, it would have similar lasting consequences.[39]

The narrators' testimonies primarily focused on their encounters with police at work. As the following pages outline, police established a

strong presence in some narrators' personal lives, even when they were not being questioned about a crime.

The police's power to harm

Even when police extended fair treatment towards sex workers, they retained the power to cause significant harm both inside and outside of work. Massage parlour workers in Wellington were particularly susceptible to police harassment at home and at the other jobs some held alongside sex work. They recalled police visiting them without warning, and inadvertently, or sometimes intentionally, revealing their involvement in sex work to their friends, colleagues, family members or neighbours. Considering the prejudice attached to sex work and the ramifications of being 'outed' as a sex worker, such police behaviour was, criminologist Jan Jordan argues, 'not only potentially hazardous but also a gross violation of civil liberties'.[40]

The law empowered police to extend their presence into workers' personal lives with the introduction of police registers. Section 19 of the Massage Parlours Act 1978 required all parlour managers to maintain a list of employees' full names, home addresses and dates of birth, for police to view or copy on demand.[41] While the lists were ostensibly intended to confirm all employees were at least eighteen years old and had no convictions for soliciting or drug offences in the past decade, they had severe effects in an industry that required discretion. Catherine Healy attested to the invasion of privacy that came with police being given access to her personal details. Catherine was living with her mother in Wellington when she started working in a local massage parlour in 1986. She remembered the invasiveness of police 'driving into our lovely little neighbourhood, parking their police car in our leafy suburb, and coming up to knock on the door to check that I was there. Quite intrusive, isn't it? It was appalling.' In a similar vein, Sue recalled that members of the vice squad not only 'knock[ed] on my door while I was at work to see if I actually lived there, but they were also sitting outside for God knows what reason'.

The law that required a register of workers applied only to massage parlours. Nevertheless, police in some parts of New Zealand extended the practice to include independent sex workers. The Christchurch police were particularly determined to elicit workers' details. In the early 1990s they reached an agreement with Christchurch's daily newspaper, the *Press*, to publish individuals' business advertisements only after they had

registered their real names, addresses and phone numbers with the vice squad detective.[42] The agreement was reportedly in response to both the rise in private advertisers and to complaints the police and the *Press* had received about hoax advertisements, whereby some people had placed false advertisements with others' phone numbers, which was embarrassing for the newspaper and put it at risk of legal action.[43] Such initiatives were not limited to Christchurch. While police in Dunedin failed to establish a similar policy in 1994 because the local press refused to participate, police in other towns were more successful in reaching agreements with their newspapers.[44] Such a scheme operated in Nelson from August 1994 to September 1995. It ended abruptly when the district commander learned of the practice and argued it was not the police's role to vet people wishing to advertise their services.[45] Meanwhile, in August 1995, Wellington Newspapers, the publishers of the *Evening Post* and the *Dominion*, also started to require written approval from police before publishing sex workers' advertisements.[46]

Several massage parlour operators certainly approved of the police's focus on independent workers. Some had complained about the competitive prices private escorts and escort agencies could offer when they did not need to pay for licences and other overheads. In 1992 one parlour operator in Hamilton launched a nationwide petition to require escort agencies and rap parlours – neither of which were explicitly covered under the Massage Parlours Act – to carry licences in a bid to end unlicensed competition.[47] The tensions between massage parlours and escort agencies escalated towards the end of the decade. From February to May 1998, police in Auckland conducted a three-month 'swoop' on private advertisers in response to complaints from 'the "big boys" of the Auckland brothel scene'.[48] This resulted in nine workers being arrested and charged with operating a massage parlour without a licence.

While private operators spoke of the prohibitive costs of a licence, parlour managers expressed anger at private escorts 'who worked illegally from home and undercut prices'.[49] The owners of a popular massage parlour in Christchurch described the scene as 'very ugly at times', having received anonymous bomb scares and death threats, which they attributed to their competitors.[50] They called for an end to unlicensed escorts, where 'every establishment [would be] brought under something like the Massage Parlours Act'. They expressed very positive feelings towards the 'decent, respectful, and very accommodating' police in Christchurch, whom they wanted to 'still maintain control'.[51] Such actions highlight some of the tensions between

massage parlours and escort agencies that were amplified by inequitable laws that appeared to disproportionately regulate certain parts of the industry.

For the most part, however, the industry was overwhelmingly outraged that workers were being forced to submit their private details to the police and the newspapers. The NZPC was a vocal opponent of this initiative as a violation of workers' privacy. In a letter to Police Commissioner Richard Macdonald in September 1995, NZPC national coordinator Catherine Healy argued the practice was 'discriminatory on policy grounds' and breached several laws including the Human Rights and Privacy Acts of 1993, neither of which restricted adult entertainment advertisements.[52] She argued that the scheme, while 'no doubt well-intentioned', would make it even harder for sex workers to operate in the open and would subsequently push the industry underground.[53] NZPC representatives in Christchurch also contested the requirements on advertising as an 'unwelcome intrusion' and 'yet another method of stigmatising and discriminating against sex workers'.[54]

The advertising requirements meant newspaper staff were added to the apparently ever-increasing list of people who had access to workers' personal details. Anna Reed spoke in her interview of workers' concerns about their privacy and safety. Anna joined the NZPC in 1989 as the coordinator of the Christchurch branch, which initially existed as a separate phone line she operated from her living room. She explained:

> We always were concerned about who had access to that information. We had goes at the *Press* for ages. I mean, you'd go to put your advertisement in, and they'd just take this folder off the shelf and open it up and there's people's personal details there. Who has access to this? The cleaners? You know, anybody. So, it took a lot of work to get them to at least put it under lock and key. And then what about the police? Somebody wanting to look somebody up? Somebody's mate wanting to look somebody up?

Anna's concerns for independent workers escalated when a 'particularly bad egg' within the Christchurch police extended the rule to require photographs of people who wanted to advertise. Anna immediately filed a complaint with the police commissioner:

> Well, we were outraged. I was outraged. This was early days in the Collective. And I spent a weekend ringing around everyone who was advertising in the Christchurch *Press* to see how they felt about having their photographs taken. . . . And some people didn't mind, 'Oh no, it's for our safety, it's all right', and others felt it was a breach of their human rights and a whole lot of other things. Well, it got back to [the officer]. Like, the next day. I went to work on the Tuesday, and I got a phone call at work from him saying, 'I think you and I better talk.' 'That's all right', full of bravado. 'Your place or mine?' [laughs]. He said, '*Mine*.' So, I went to him the next day, and he said, 'Why are you spreading all these vicious lies about me?' I said, 'Don't you give me the credit for it, they go on without me.' He looked at me and said, 'I never liked you', and I said, 'I never liked you either.' And we stared down at each other, and I thought, This is not going to be very productive.

Some police in Christchurch justified the register by arguing that it would help them to identify missing or deceased persons, contact escorts to warn them about danger, prevent false advertisements, and gather information regarding organised crime and the sexual exploitation of children.[55] Yet these rationales provided little comfort to those working in the industry, some of whom voiced their scepticism in the pages of *Siren*. Writing in response to one letter which argued that police were breaking the law by demanding private workers' details, the editors sarcastically replied:

> You ungrateful thing, don't you realise the police register is a special service that they considerately provide us poor whores with for our own protection – in case we go missing so that our photo can be circulated and published in the newspapers under the heading 'Prostitute goes missing'. Anyone would think we have no friends or family that could do likewise under these circumstances.[56]

The practice of police providing escorts with written approval to advertise their services further complicated the relationship between law enforcement and the sex industry. Some viewed the police's permission to advertise as approval to work, and thought they 'need not fear prosecution

provided they committed no other crimes'.[57] These issues came to national attention in mid-1995, when the owners of Corporate Affairs, an escort service in Wellington, were arrested and subsequently convicted on nine charges of brothel-keeping and one charge of living off the earnings of prostitution. The *Dominion* reported that the circumstances of the prosecution were 'made even more curious by the existence of an unofficial police registration system'.[58] Consequently, police in Wellington released a statement to clarify that successful applicants would continue to receive written permission from police to advertise their services, but they were certainly not exempt from prosecution.

Considering the stigma attached to sex work, the ramifications of appearing on the register far outweighed any potential benefit for sex workers. The NZPC heard complaints from people who remained on the register despite stopping work and requesting that their details be removed.[59] The Collective was also informed of someone's status as 'a known prostitute' being raised in court for an unrelated case, potentially biasing the court against them. Most damagingly, a police officer in Christchurch allegedly forced one woman to withdraw a rape complaint by threatening to show her parents the register, which included her name and other details.[60]

The increasing availability of the internet and internet cafés by the turn of the millennium enabled some people to bypass the rules by advertising online.[61] Nevertheless, the use of the registers prevailed in some parts of the country until the Prostitution Reform Act came into law. Even after decriminalisation, police in the Nelson Bays region considered continuing the registers '[i]f it is of value to us and to people involved in the sex industry'.[62] Additionally, some of the people I interviewed voiced concerns about the continued existence of the registers. They were conscious that their personal details and involvement in sex work could be exposed at any time without their prior knowledge or consent. The managing director of one escort agency announced he had burned the files and disposed of the remains. But the Public Records Act reportedly prohibits police from destroying the registers in their possession until they receive authorisation to do so.[63]

Victim-blaming rape myths and ugly mugs

Sex workers' protections and avenues for redress were eroded by laws that deemed them criminals, coupled with public attitudes that sex workers were

culpable for any violence they endured. Some held back from reporting crimes out of fear that either the police would ignore their complaints and arrest them for soliciting instead, or they would have to endure extensive questioning and a lengthy and humiliating court procedure.[64] Labour MP Georgina Beyer's impassioned speech at the third reading of the Prostitution Law Reform Bill on 25 June 2003 has been remembered for exposing how the law failed sex industry workers. Beyer shared her experience of being raped at knifepoint. She argued that her position as a sex worker, especially as a Māori trans woman, meant reporting the crime to the police was not an option. She declared:

> It would have been nice to know that instead of having to deal out justice afterwards to that person myself, I might have been able to approach the authorities – the police in this case – and say: 'I was raped, and, yes, I'm a prostitute, and no, it was not right that I should have been raped, because I said "no", and it was not paid attention to.'[65]

Some narrators certainly experienced the law working against them when they reported an assault. This was especially clear in Pippa's testimony. Pippa grew up in the lower South Island in the 1980s. She spent her childhood and early teenage years being homeschooled by her fundamentalist Christian parents, who used an Amish curriculum they had ordered from the United States. Pippa remembered her home life as very abusive and she was placed in foster care at the age of fifteen. She loved her foster mother, describing the experience as 'amazing. It was absolutely fantastic.' Pippa's entry into the sex industry came at the age of seventeen in 2000 when she gained a job with an escort agency. By that time, she had moved to Christchurch to study multimedia and simultaneously worked as an intern at Tahu FM. She described her motivations for starting sex work as purely financial: 'Because I'd had nothing, I suddenly wanted everything. . . . [It] was purely money because I wanted more money to blow on everything I ever wanted.' While Pippa had no prior contact with the sex industry, she was attractive, could separate her emotions from sex, and felt suited to the work. Her foster brother became her sole confidant and was the only person who knew 'why I looked so good and why I had all the cool clothes.'

Pippa felt forced to flee Christchurch, however, after a former classmate drugged and sexually assaulted her. The trauma of being assaulted,

combined with her fears of retaliation from the rapist and his friends, meant Pippa did not report the crime to police as 'I just felt that I couldn't'. Indeed, it would take her several years to remember the violent attack in full. Her narrative highlights the onus placed on survivors to prove an assault took place. Despite having a medical report, she was conscious that would be insufficient physical evidence. She was also disheartened by the experiences of friends who had reported sexual assaults to the police but 'did not have good results'.

In her interview, Pippa reflected on internalising the negative views of sex and sexuality with which she had been raised. While the first assault took place after she had quit her job as an escort, she remembered interpreting it as her punishment for being involved in sex work:

> Prostitution was something that I swore at that point that I was never, ever going to go near again. Why? Because it all got tangled up with everything that my mother had ever said to me about sex and how evil I was for being such a sexual being. I saw myself as having got the punishment she said that I deserved for engaging in that kind of activity. So, I let everything my mum and dad said overwhelm my head as well, and I got myself in a hell of a mess, I really did. I got myself so tangled up I didn't know what I was thinking or doing. Yeah, so I felt that rape was my punishment for being a prostitute.

When asked by the interviewer if she had since reconciled those thoughts, she responded:

> Well, it happened again when I did it again. So, it's been a long, hard road to being able to just live with myself, but . . . I did not deserve it either time. I'm a person that deserves love and respect, and these days I won't settle for anything less. It's taken me a long, long time to realise that I deserve love that is separate from sex.

The second assault Pippa mentioned took place when she worked in a parlour in the early 2000s. While her colleagues managed to remove the perpetrator from the premises, the parlour manager 'wouldn't believe me'. Her manager not only disposed of the physical evidence, but also later

informed Pippa 'that she didn't want me working for her any more, that I was just a shit-stirrer and a troublemaker that made up lies about being raped and things like that'.

Pippa's testimony shows how prejudice and misplaced blame on sex workers impeded them from gaining justice. On this occasion, she reported the assault to the police with support from a staff member from Rape Crisis, who accompanied her to the station. Yet she remembered:

> [The detective] said, 'Well, there's nothing we can do because you're just a prostitute.' And he said, 'This is one of those situations where only you and him were in the room, he's going to say he didn't do it, you said he did do it, you've got no evidence, so we're not going to do anything about it. By the way, what's that bruise on your arm? And who's done that? We've got a zero-tolerance policy towards violence because it's Christmas time. Your husband do that?' 'Yes.' So instead of arresting my rapist, they spent ten hours hunting for my husband and arrested him.

Such hostile responses to rape complainants sometimes also came from within the sex industry. With Pippa's prompting, the judge discharged her husband without conviction and ordered the prosecution to reopen her complaint. An 'absolutely awesome' detective was assigned to her case and arrested the perpetrator after a full investigation. Nevertheless, 'the parlour had closed ranks on me and everybody at the parlour was telling a bunch of lies at that point. So, I had no one to back up my story, at all.' Consequently, the detective was forced to close the case, having insufficient evidence to proceed with a prosecution.

Pippa found some comfort in her ability to report the crime and the response she received from the second detective. She concluded that 'at least I can say this time that I went to the police straight away and I genuinely tried my damnedest to get that guy off the streets'. She also received support from two long-term clients, both of whom 'were genuinely upset and angry and they boycotted the parlour. And one of them rang the police to tell them what a lovely person I was and how they wanted something done.' Her testimony also spoke to the complicated personal loyalties at play, and she acknowledged, 'It was really hard to have all of the girls that I thought were my friends betray me like that, it was really, really, difficult.'

Even when rape complaints went to trial, victim-blaming rape myths often impacted their outcomes. Barbara Sullivan's research highlights cases in Australia and New Zealand where the judges used the complainants' occupations as sex workers to justify lighter sentences for rape. These included a New Zealand case in 1987 when the judge claimed assaulting a sex worker was a 'very different case from a woman who does not want to have sex at all'.[66] As Sullivan argues, 'feminist activism, rape law reform and improvements in social attitudes towards women working in prostitution' meant some sex workers managed to launch successful rape complaints by the late 1980s and early 1990s. For the most part, however, barriers to reporting these crimes were exacerbated by the knowledge that few trials resulted in a conviction.[67]

By the 1990s, some sex workers' reports were investigated and prosecuted. In mid-1993, the managers of appointment-only parlour The Apartment sought help from the Criminal Investigation Branch of the police and Telecom security after they received numerous abusive phone calls and false bookings from competing escort agencies. Their complaint resulted in at least one offender being charged, and they concluded that the 'police are so helpful'.[68] The following year, in April 1994, the NZPC praised the guilty verdict of Stephen Karl Collie, an Auckland man sentenced to sixteen years' imprisonment for violently attacking seven sex workers on K (Karangahape) Road. NZPC spokesperson Catherine Healy identified the sentence as 'amazingly progressive', especially compared with recent decisions across the Tasman.[69] The decisions she was referring to included one case where a Victorian judge justified a short sentence for rape by identifying the complainant's occupation as a sex worker as 'a relevant consideration when determining the appropriate sentence', and another where three male judges claimed sex workers 'suffer little or no sense of shame or defilement when raped'.[70] The latter case led to a protest of two hundred people, mostly women, outside Victoria's Supreme Court with placards demanding 'Sack Sexist Judges'.[71] By comparison, Collie's sentence served as an important message to New Zealand sex workers that 'when they lay complaints they will be taken seriously'.[72] Nevertheless, as Pippa's testimony illustrates, instances where complainants received justice appear to have been in the minority.

The court system revictimised complainants and deterred some sex workers from reporting crimes, even within their community. Their concerns were illustrated in workers' varied responses to the Ugly Mugs List.

The practice of compiling an Ugly Mugs List began in Australia in 1986, when the Australian Prostitutes Collective circulated descriptions of violent men among brothels and street-based sex workers in Sydney, Newcastle and regional New South Wales.[73] Sex worker activists in Aotearoa followed suit. In 1989, the editors of *Siren* encouraged readers to submit details of 'a dangerous or rip-off client' to include in the newly established Ugly Mugs List.[74] They sought information about the perpetrator's physical appearance, their vehicle registration number, and a description of their crimes, which NZPC volunteers distributed among parlours and street-based workers in their regions. The editors also liaised with other organisations, including Rape Crisis, to obtain descriptions of 'dangerous men who are menacing sex industry workers' and other women, and promised 'absolute confidentiality'.[75]

The launch of the list aligned with sex workers' well-established practice of verbally warning one another about which men to avoid. It proved most useful for street-based workers, who screened potential clients before getting into their vehicles.[76] One worker interviewed for the *New Zealand Herald* in 1990 described aggressive and violent clients on the streets as 'quite the norm'. They acknowledged that workers' usual screening practices could not guarantee their safety: 'You can't always tell just by looking or instinct which men are the dangerous ones. "The guy might look nice. Newish car. Seems okay. But the next minute he wants more than he's prepared to pay for. And if you won't give it, watch out."' Through initiatives like the Ugly Mugs List, sex workers banded together to keep themselves safe: 'the one thing we can do is watch out for one another'.[77] Some police in the Waikato also reportedly requested regular updates of the Ugly Mugs List.[78]

Yet those working in the industry also recognised that the list on its own was not sufficient to protect workers from being attacked. Michelle McGill served as the coordinator for NZPC Auckland from 1994 to 1999. Speaking in an interview with *Metro* in 1997, she explained that while the list 'works very well', it merely provided a 'safety net' by warning workers about men known to be dangerous. She concluded that decriminalisation was essential to save lives.[79] Some workers were also reportedly reluctant to make a submission as they feared they would be forced to testify in court.[80] In 1996, the NZPC assured readers that it could advocate on behalf of complainants, that it treated complaints confidentially, and that it could arrange sympathetic counsellors.[81] It also encouraged people to phone in with descriptions of perpetrators to add to the Ugly Mugs List, even if they did not want to go to the police.[82]

The mere existence of written records like the Ugly Mugs List put sex worker operators and activists at risk of legal action. In 1996, Wellington police produced an escort agency's 'dud clients list' as evidence during their trial for brothel-keeping.[83] The NZPC also risked complaints from men who featured on the list. Anna Reed recounted the challenge of publishing sufficient identifying information to be of use to workers, while also obscuring enough details to protect the NZPC from defamation complaints. Nevertheless, 'we always knew we were skating on thin ice'. Such issues soon materialised. In 2001, NZPC Auckland was forced to discontinue the physical list when an individual recognised himself in the booklet and threatened to sue the Collective.[84] After pursuing legal advice, NZPC Christchurch managed to continue an amended version of the list for several more years.[85] The amendments included featuring a disclaimer that specified it was only for sex workers and was not to be shown to any third party, and limiting details to include only four digits of a vehicle licence plate or a telephone number, one part of a perpetrator's name, and street names without street numbers.[86] Importantly, entries could still provide full physical descriptions and, with the worker's consent, details of the incident. The difficulties sex workers faced in maintaining Ugly Mugs Lists stand in stark comparison to the police registers discussed earlier. While workers were required to provide their personal details to police and newspaper staff, they were simultaneously forced to protect perpetrators' privacy by obscuring details when trying to protect themselves and others from harm.

Together, the oral histories presented in this chapter challenge assertions that relations between sex workers and police drastically improved in the late twentieth century, and expose the fallacy that low conviction rates are adequate evidence of the police's increasing tolerance of sex work. The interviews revealed narrators' complex relationships with police while working under inequitable laws that disproportionately affected those in more visible parts of the industry, like street-based and parlour workers. Narrators spoke of the violence and humiliation they experienced while in police custody, and the transphobia and anti-sex-work prejudice that prevented sex workers from gaining justice for crimes committed against them. The interviews reveal how the prejudices that shaped sex workers' experiences with the criminal justice system did not immediately dissipate with decriminalisation in 2003. The following chapter further teases out this history of stigmatisation and prejudice by focusing on individuals' decisions to publicly identify as sex workers, and the high cost to them of doing so.

CHAPTER TWO

The Cost of Going Public

In October 1988, the *Capital Times,* a free weekly newspaper in Wellington, announced the establishment of New Zealand's first sex worker-led organisation, the New Zealand Prostitutes' Collective.[1] The half-page press release was just the beginning of the NZPC's public activism. Over the following years, NZPC outreach staff and volunteers spoke to newspaper reporters across the country, appeared on radio shows and public affairs television programmes, and accepted invitations to present at local and international conferences. They collaborated with policymakers and academic researchers to campaign for decriminalisation, to challenge stigma and discrimination, and to advocate for sex workers' rights. Their visibility was instrumental in combatting 'incorrect and scurrilous' media reports that fuelled prejudice against sex workers.[2] Yet going public as sex workers came at a cost to those involved.

This chapter traces the growing unity and visibility of sex workers across the late twentieth century with the development of the NZPC. It highlights how activists dealt with increased attention from police and declining business, both of which they attributed to their decisions to mobilise in pursuit of sex workers' rights. It then moves on to consider the voices of those who did not seek connections with other sex workers, and who were not aware that support within the industry was possible. The final part of this chapter examines how prejudice attached to sex work prevailed within

the wider adult entertainment industry. Together, the oral histories reveal how individuals did or did not engage with the evolving community of sex workers, and the benefits and challenges that came with mobilisation.

Developing a national network of sex workers

In 1987, nine individuals employed in Wellington massage parlours gathered to discuss forming an organisation to advocate for the rights of sex workers and to prevent the transmission of HIV. Their gathering is widely regarded as the first official meeting of the NZPC. The history of the Collective is well documented. Several of those involved in its establishment, including the founding spokesperson and national coordinator, Catherine Healy, who would later be honoured for her advocacy work with a damehood, have authored book chapters and journal articles that trace the group's evolution from the late 1980s.

Community organising among sex workers in New Zealand is located in a wider international movement whereby sex workers around the world mobilised and agitated for legislative reforms and the protection of their human rights. Activists have traced the 'forgotten and fiery beginnings of the contemporary sex workers' movement' to the riots at Compton's Cafeteria in San Fransisco in 1966 and at the Stonewall Inn in New York in 1969, where 'transgender sex workers and gay hustlers fought back against yet another rousing' by police.[3] Formal organising among sex workers soon followed. Sex worker activism is most visible through the establishment of peer-led sex workers' rights organisations, beginning with COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics) – initially called Whores, Housewives, and Others – in San Francisco in 1973.[4] The movement gained further momentum in June 1975 when, with support from the local Catholic priest, nearly one hundred sex workers occupied a church in Lyon, France, to protest police harassment and laws that criminalised sex work.[5] Their actions galvanised sex workers around the country. Nearly twenty thousand sex workers across France joined in an eight-day nationwide protest. It inspired the establishment of other peer-led organisations, including the English Collective of Prostitutes in 1975, Prostitutes of New York (PONY) in 1976, and the Australian Prostitutes Collective in 1983. In New Zealand, however, community organising around sex workers' rights 'was unknown' before the HIV and AIDS epidemic.[6]

This is not to suggest that sex workers in Aotearoa were less interested or engaged in sex worker activism than their overseas counterparts. In the

NEW ZEALAND Prostitutes Collective national co-ordinator Catherine Healy says sex industry workers are forced by the laws governing prostitution to be underhand in most of their dealings.

Catherine Healy with safe sex poster in *New Zealand Woman's Weekly*, May 1992. Photograph: Neil Mackenzie, courtesy of Are Media

early 1980s, Sue Forbes held a part-time role at Wellington's Women's Resource Centre – a 'feminist "hot point"' that opened in June 1979 and hosted meetings, workshops and a library – alongside her work at a local parlour. Sue and one of her colleagues at the Centre had read about COYOTE's activities in San Francisco and planned to start a local sex worker group in partnership with Hecate Women's Health Collective.[7] Hecate occupied two of the Centre's four rooms at 6 Boulcott Street, Wellington Central, and facilitated self-help groups and workshops, hosted counselling sessions, and offered information about orthodox medicine upon request.[8] Yet the two women were discouraged by a friend who owned a parlour and 'didn't think it was a good idea. So, we put that idea to bed.'

While Sue did not elaborate on her friend's opposition to their proposed organisation, such resistance among parlour owners appears to have been widespread. Several workers reported that, before the onset of HIV and AIDS, parlour managers impeded their attempts to mobilise.[9] Another woman had reportedly received death threats for trying to set up an organisation for sex workers in the mid-1980s.[10] The absence of an organisation until the establishment of the NZPC in 1987 meant that, as one worker attested, entry into sex work involved competitiveness with other workers, exploitation by parlour managers, and 'learning from our mistakes (which were many and dangerous)'.[11]

It is important to note that the founding members were conscious that they might lose their autonomy by accepting funding and entering into a contract with the government, especially when most elements of sex work were criminalised.[12] As a peer-led organisation, they aimed to 'create a more fluid movement that people could move in and out of easily' and resisted membership lists and other 'formalities [which] were seen as barriers to becoming part of a move for change'.[13]

The initial expansion of a national network of sex workers from the late 1980s was most visible with the establishment of NZPC drop-in centres. The NZPC received its first instalment of funding from the Department of Health in October 1988 and opened its first drop-in centre in Wellington the following month. It subsequently established a drop-in centre in Auckland in February 1989, under the guidance of trans volunteer peer-educators Helen, Mana and Roxanne, and shared an office with Auckland Drug Information Outreach.[14] NZPC Christchurch began that same year; it consisted of a separate phone line in coordinator Anna Reed's home until they secured a drop-in centre on Lichfield Street five years later, in 1994. The NZPC

Dunedin drop-in centre opened in November 1990 in the premises of DIVO, Dunedin's after-hours needle exchange programme.[15] Volunteers in Dunedin visited parlour workers and escorts around the Otago and Southland regions, and at times travelled up to 300 kilometres from their base.[16] The drop-in centres enabled people working in the industry to access information and peer support, purchase subsidised safe sex products including condoms, lubricants and dental dams, access needle exchange services, and undergo sexual health checks by visiting doctors and nurses.[17] Additionally, from the early 1990s, NZPC coordinators in Hamilton, Tauranga and Taranaki provided outreach services to those working in these areas.

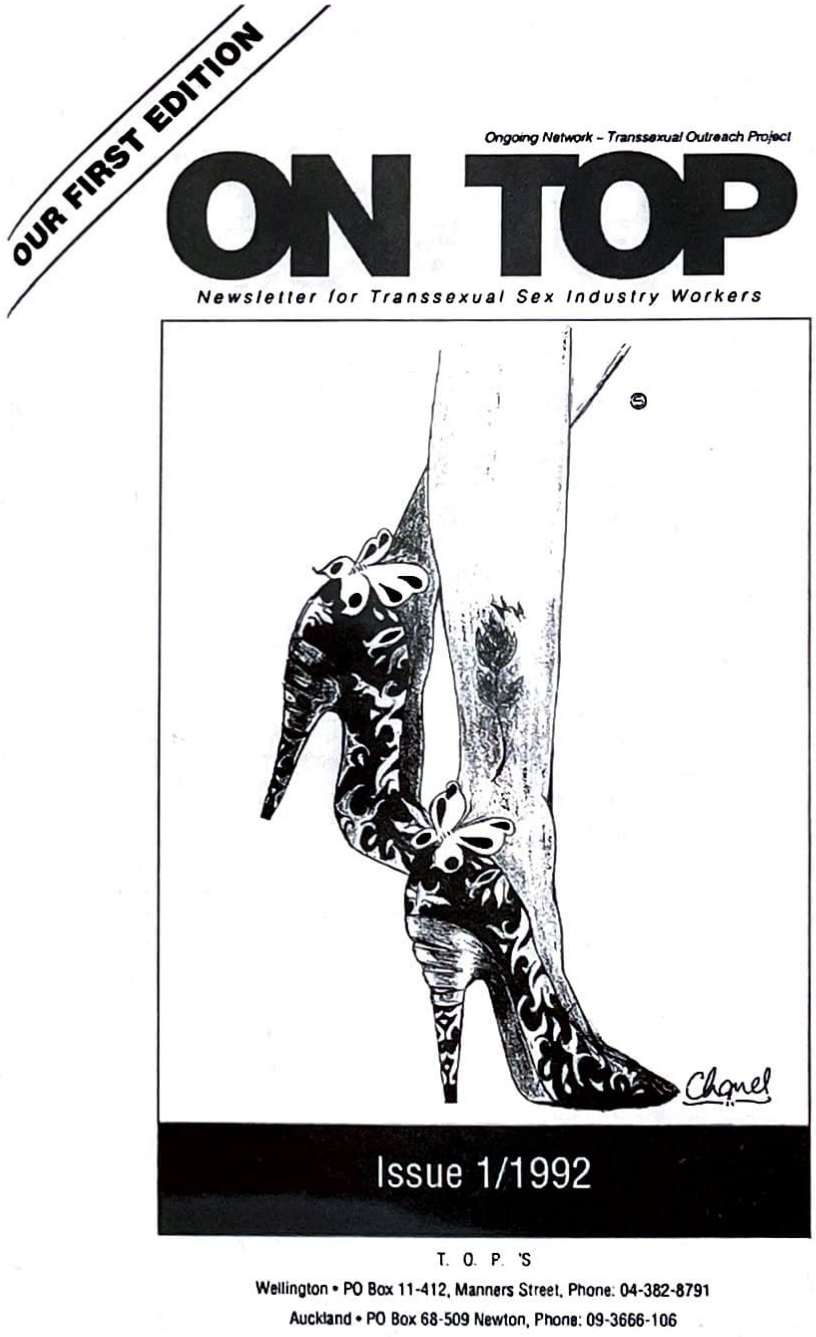
The launch of the NZPC's national magazine, *Siren: Sex Industry Rights and Education Network*, in November 1988 was instrumental in raising awareness of the growing sex worker community. The establishment of *Siren* formed part of the NZPC's contract with the Department of Health to produce a national HIV and AIDS prevention programme.[18] The Wellington-based editors identified *Siren* as the 'beginning of a movement throughout New Zealand which will enhance our industry'.[19] They aimed to 'pull the sex industry into a cohesive network, with better communication at all levels'.[20] Part-time staff and volunteers distributed *Siren* free of charge to massage parlours and street-based workers, and at the drop-in centres.

In June 1992, the newly formed Ongoing Network – Transsexual Outreach Project (On Top) launched its newsletter as a lift-out section of *Siren*.[21] The founding members had convened three months earlier at the inaugural International Indigenous Peoples of the Land Coming Together HIV/AIDS Conference, hosted by Te Roopu Tautoko Trust, the first Māori takatāpui group. Takatāpui is a traditional Māori term meaning 'intimate companion of the same sex'. Since the early 1980s, it has been increasingly used as an inclusive term to embrace all Māori who identify with diverse genders and sexualities.[22] Speaking at the five-day conference in Auckland, some of the founding members, then identified as the 'Transpeoples HIV/AIDS Collective' within the NZPC, hosted a workshop on self-determination in HIV and AIDS education and support within their community.[23] Their newsletter, *On Top*, reflected this message of self-determination. From the first edition, the editors emphasised their goal to 'develop a resource which would be specific to the health needs of transsexuals'.[24] They argued, 'there's heaps of stuff targeted at men who have sex with men, injecting drug users, and female sex workers – but where are the resources aimed at us? Maybe [it's] up to us to develop them!'[25] Subsequent editions of *On Top*

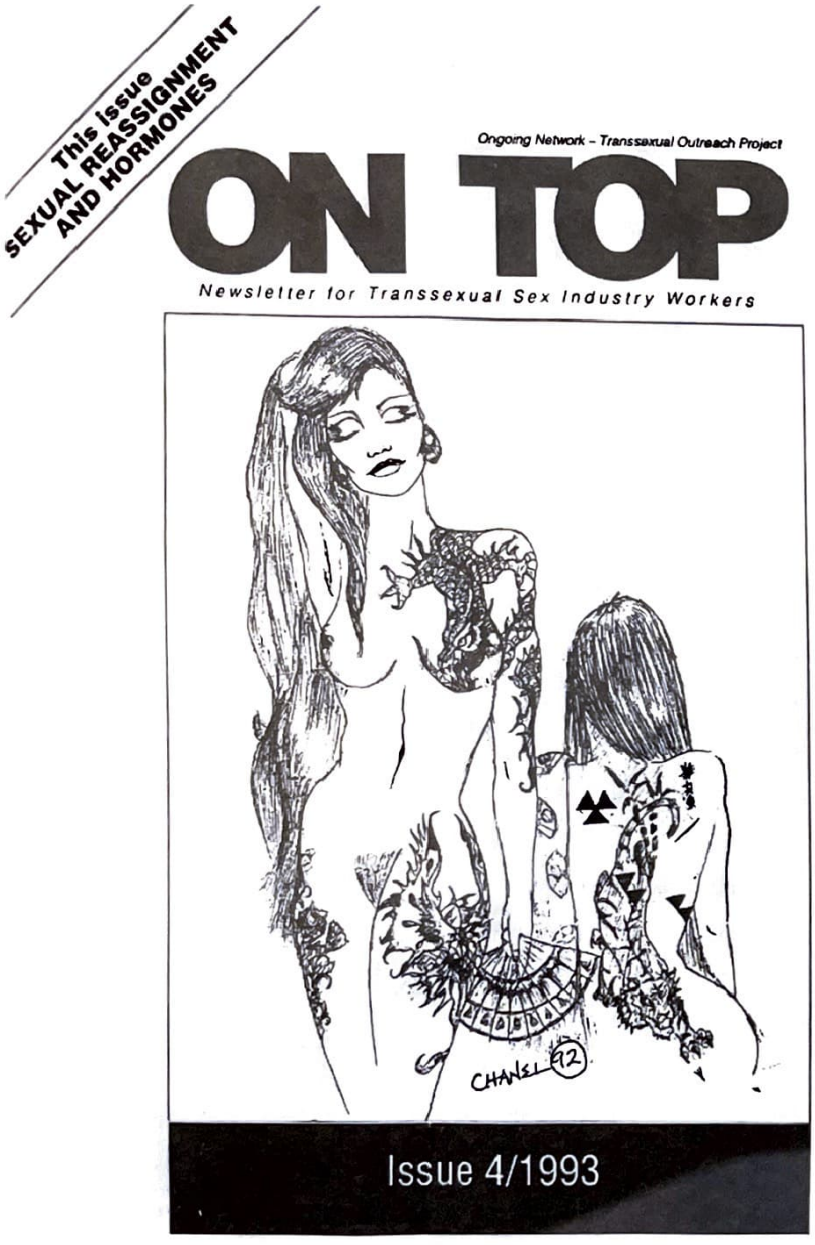
featured advice on safe sex, updates about the law, individuals' experiences of undergoing surgery, warnings about police, living with HIV or AIDS, and being a trans person in prison. Coordinator Roxanne encouraged readers, 'let us all come together and be a force to be reckoned with'.[26]

Four months later, in October 1992, *Siren* featured 'Trade Secrets', the 'first column in New Zealand to focus on the male sex industry'. A male worker in Wellington established the column with help from the NZPC and focused on government decisions on decriminalisation and the Human Rights Bill, safe sex information, and written contributions from male sex workers. The self-determination message that had influenced the editors of *Siren* and *On Top* also emerged in the column, and the founder presented 'Trade Secrets' as an opportunity 'for us to empower ourselves and start up something solely for ourselves'.[27] 'Trade Secrets' continued until August 1993, when the newly established peer support group PUMP, Pride and Unity for Male Prostitutes, launched its newsletter in *Siren*. In addition to publishing a regular newsletter that featured advice on safe sex and personal stories from male sex workers and their clients, PUMP also hosted afternoon get-togethers and workshops at the NZPC drop-in centre in Wellington, and later extended its services to include counselling.[28] It focused on building a network for male sex workers, who primarily worked alone or for escort agencies.[29]

The importance of the visibility of a national network of sex workers cannot be overstated. In 1991, one worker wrote to *Siren* to attest to the value of the NZPC, the centres' supplies of unused needles, and the increasing acceptance of sex workers and drug users as 'the best thing that has happened to the sex industry'. They stated that their heightened self-esteem, 'helped partly by NZPC', enabled them to refute their therapist's claim that they were in the sex industry due to being emotionally damaged. On the contrary, 'I can now say – BULLSHIT I choose my job as a career, a profession. I am good at it, I help people it is really interesting well paid with good hours.'[30] At the same time, some parlour managers impeded the NZPC's attempts to engage with its target audience. One manager, who identified himself as 'a bit of a male chauvinist', reportedly forbade staff from reading *Siren* as 'they get the wrong idea'.[31] Some parlour managers also withheld the magazine from staff or threw it in the rubbish bin in front of the NZPC coordinators who delivered it to the venues.


OUR FIRST EDITION
Ongoing Network – Transsexual Outreach Project
ON TOP
Newsletter for Transsexual Sex Industry Workers
Chanel
Issue 1/1992
T. O. P. 'S
Wellington • PO Box 11-412, Manners Street, Phone: 04-382-8791
Auckland • PO Box 68-509 Newton, Phone: 09-3666-106

Cover of *On Top* in *Siren*, first issue, June 1992. Artwork: Chanel


This issue
SEXUAL REASSIGNMENT
AND HORMONES
Ongoing Network - Transsexual Outreach Project
ON TOP
Newsletter for Transsexual Sex Industry Workers
CHANEL 92
Issue 4/1993
T. O. P. 'S
Wellington • PO Box 11-412, Manners Street, Phone: 04-382-8791
Auckland • PO Box 68-509 Newton, Phone: 09-3666-106

Cover of *On Top* in *Siren*, August 1993. Artwork: Chanel

Implications of 'coming out' as sex workers

The NZPC's achievements in publicly advocating for the rights of sex workers, challenging discrimination and building support for decriminalisation over two decades are well acknowledged. Less so is the impact activists' public advocacy had on their personal lives. Catherine Healy's testimony highlights both the support she and others received and the resistance they faced as they fought to establish a sex worker movement in New Zealand. Catherine's activism spans several decades. She made her first foray into the sex industry in 1978 and undertook street-based work for a year outside of her hours as a primary school teacher in Porirua. She returned to the industry eight years later in May 1986 and gained an evening job as a receptionist at Number 12 massage parlour in Wellington to supplement her teacher's salary. Yet she felt uncomfortable with her managerial position and wanted to be 'with the crowd, one of the girls'. After two months as a receptionist, Catherine 'crossed over' and started to work in the rooms. She remembered feeling 'on top of the crest of the wave. I felt very strong and empowered and happy and stimulated and all those things that you associate with a good job.' Nevertheless, she was cognisant of the stigma attached to sex work and the lack of an organisation – like the New Zealand Educational Institute, which she had experienced as a teacher – that advocated for improved working conditions.

Catherine's interest in campaigning for workers' rights intensified when she met several politically minded women from a nearby parlour, the Lily of the Valley. The women joined Number 12 en masse while their venue underwent renovations. Catherine remembered them as 'very cohesive, and articulate, and beautiful [laughs], and intimidating as well'. They 'seemed to flat, and shop, and eat, and talk, and had a lot of social relationships going on with each other'. Importantly, the women 'had a lot of ideas and seemed to be free to discuss them'. Catherine later joined the women at their newly renovated parlour on Wakefield Street, which soon became known as a 'hotbed of NZPC activism'.

In 1988, Catherine and the other founding members informed police in Wellington that they were 'coming out' as sex workers. It was a risky move considering soliciting, brothel-keeping and living off the earnings of sex work were criminalised in New Zealand until 2003.[32] Detective Sergeant Paul Dimery from the Wellington vice squad publicly declared his support for the NZPC in an article published in the March 1989 issue of *North & South*. He described the founding members as 'obviously intelligent [with]

the ability to organise themselves' and stated that the formation of the NZPC 'has been overdue for years and they have my full cooperation'.[33] Local police officers also supported the NZPC by referring street-based sex workers they encountered to the Collective.[34]

The possibility of an alliance between the police and the NZPC was contingent on having a vice squad that supported the Collective's efforts. The NZPC did not receive the same level of cooperation from subsequent vice squads.[35] This became immediately clear with the arrival of two new officers in 1991, who introduced themselves to the Wellington scene by posing as clients and arresting nine women across three major massage parlours.[36] Shortly afterwards, the officers arranged a meeting with local massage parlour owners, whom, as Catherine remembered, they reprimanded for 'things [being] just too open, and they'd done it to teach the parlour owners a lesson'. Despite the police's focus on parlour owners, it was the masseuses who were left with the fines and criminal charges. Catherine attended the meeting as NZPC spokesperson. She remembered her discomfort at watching business owners, who were usually 'confident in their own domain', being lectured by officers half their age: 'It was just such a rude thing.' Criminologist Jan Jordan described the relationship between the sex industry and the new vice squad as 'severely strained'. It was characterised by a 'new tone of harshness', as evident in the increased raids on massage parlours and arrests of street-based workers.[37]

The police raids disturbed many of those in the industry, who feared any affiliation with the NZPC would attract attention from the police. Some parlour managers subsequently refused to display the NZPC's safe sex posters or copies of *Siren*, given that both would imply they knew sexual activity occurred on the premises.[38] Catherine recalled how the raids threatened her relationships with peers and parlour managers, and also her livelihood:

> I was a liability; I was a hot potato in any massage parlour as well because I was seen as a troublemaker. There was a sense that I would bring the heat down on the parlour if I was there working. And that was really difficult because when the police did this big raid on three of the parlours and arrested nine women including me, they said it was the Collective's fault; they'd done this because things were too open, and it was our fault. So, they were quite pointed. And the massage parlour owners got together, and they tried to encourage my

> manager to get rid of me. They tried to drum me out and I was really in quite a vulnerable position there. And I needed that work, so I had to work secretly. So, it was pretty tough.

Catherine had resigned from her teaching position four years earlier in 1987, and the massage parlour was her sole source of income. 'And so that meant, fuck, where am I going to work? Where am I going to work?'

The visibility of the NZPC also affected some activists' relationships with their clients. Anna Reed was born in Dunedin in 1943 and spent most of her childhood and teenage years in Wellington. She described a lifelong fascination with the sex industry. As a teenager, she had read court cases in the *Evening Post* about women who were imprisoned for procuring, and 'I didn't really understand why that was wrong'. After several years living in Europe, and then in communes in the Coromandel, Hokianga and Nelson, Anna settled in Christchurch with her two young daughters. It was there that she started sex work by joining Pamper Visiting Massage Service in 1977 at the age of thirty-four. Anna described her new career as 'exactly what I should be doing'. Her outrage at the initial title of the NZPC's magazine, then called *Fallen Angel*, encapsulated her pride in sex work. 'I was appalled. I said, "I do not consider myself fallen, I have risen! And I will not contribute to this magazine while it has this title."' Anna was certainly not alone in her opposition to the magazine's title. The NZPC changed the name to *Siren* midway through printing and distributing the first edition in response to several complaints from readers.

Anna was well experienced with community organisations. She had been working as a volunteer for the New Zealand AIDS Foundation (NZAF) when she accepted an invitation from Catherine to visit the NZPC drop-in centre in Wellington in 1989. Rodger Wright, an activist and co-founder of the Needle Exchange Programme in Christchurch, served alongside Catherine on the National Council on AIDS and had put the two women in touch. Anna remembered 'walking into that first office they had on Cuba Street, and I saw a filing cabinet. I thought [gasps], information! Information on the sex industry! I was so impressed with that filing cabinet, that's what sold the Collective to me.' She met several others at the drop-in centre, including 'quite a big trans community', and felt 'all these people were into the political side of sex work, how amazing! I was so impressed.' Anna subsequently became the coordinator of NZPC Christchurch and served as the media spokesperson for the South Island. She was often featured in the

Christchurch *Press* and was particularly vocal about how the law penalised sex workers.

Anna's public role with the NZPC potentially deterred her regular clients, some of whom she had worked with for up to fifteen years:

> Interestingly, when I started having to do public stuff and my face went out there, some of those regulars stopped coming. I think it was getting too close to home. Yeah. That was the first thing I noticed. I kept thinking, Oh, it's 'cause I'm getting old. I was probably in my early fifties when I noticed, that's funny. You see somebody come in and you think, I used to go through with him a lot, I haven't been through with him for ages. And I think they just felt that I was getting a bit confrontational for them.

By contrast, Anna noted how her role with the NZPC made her involvement in sex work more palatable for some people in her private life. She had been open about sex work from the outset, and, while her friends 'got used to it, really', her mother was much more alarmed. Anna phoned her mother shortly after her first shift to share news about her 'wonderful job' where 'I just have hour-long love affairs with people, and they give me all this money'. Her mother was horrified: '"Oh my God! Oh my God! I always have shocks from you but this time I know it can't get any worse!"' Anna remembered her mother's gradual acceptance of her work and, later, her public role as an NZPC representative:

> She said, 'You just don't seem to see that there's anything wrong with it.' And I said, 'Well, I don't.' And she couldn't quite get her head around that, to begin with. Then as years went by, she talked with a very few select female friends. And she said, 'My friends are actually quite envious of the way you've just gone ahead and done things when you wanted to do them. You wanted to have the baby without the partner – and you're damn lucky you got the government support when you did though.' She said, 'Because that wasn't available to us. And you know you've just done what you want to do.' But even though over the years she did get used to it, she'd always say, 'Promise me I'll never see you on television.' I said, 'Well,

> why ever would I be on television?' It just seemed too remote a possibility. When I became involved in the Collective I did it in a voluntary capacity for probably about three years. And she said, 'I'm not going to see you on television?' I said, 'No!' But as soon as I got a paid position, she accepted that would be part of the job. And she accepted that. And in the end, I think she was quite pleased with the way I turned out.[39]

While this comment reveals Anna's pride in having gained her mother's approval, the wider societal prejudice against sex work still prevailed. In 1998, Anna's mother was awarded the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to music. She declined Anna's offer to accompany her to the ceremony at Government House, and responded: 'Oh no, dear, they vet people!' Consequently, Anna concluded, 'at the end of the day, she didn't really think it was accepted'.

Anna reflected on how her position with the NZPC also affected her daughters' responses to her work in the industry. The girls had learned about her work in the 1980s from older children at their primary school. The teasing her children – especially her younger daughter – endured from their peers was a lasting source of pain. While Anna concluded that her career as a sex worker 'was all a joy', she identified the 'biggest negative' aspect as:

> what happened with my children, and I still feel really sad that people have to tell so many lies in order to justify their existence in terms of pretending that they're not working or not wanting to tell people because they fear they're going to be judged or treated differently. I think that's the reality for a lot of people, and that makes me really, really sad because I know it doesn't have to be like that. And I think that until people can be more open, I think society will judge them.

Anna's talk of openness perhaps reflects the role she later took in her daughters' lives. Both of her daughters were teenagers when she became active in the NZPC in 1989. Her younger daughter had volunteered alongside her with the NZAF and helped to care for Rodger Wright in their home before he died in 1993. Anna had also been invited to act as a guest speaker for each of her daughters' women's studies classes at high school. She concluded: 'They both grew up; they both have a totally different understanding of it now.

And they think it's shit hot [laughs]. No, they think the work I do, especially with the Prostitutes' Collective, is wonderful.'

Though acceptance of the NZPC grew, it was not universal. In early June 1995, NZPC Tauranga announced its first drop-in centre by publishing a small notice in the *Bay of Plenty Times*. Coordinator Jo Tassell had secured the brick flat owned by Presbyterian Support Services after a 'disheartening' five-month-long search and multiple rejections from prospective landlords.[40] The announcement triggered an 'immediate uproar' from residents, who launched a campaign to evict them.[41] Residents were particularly opposed to the needle exchange scheme the NZPC offered and voiced concerns that people would leave their used needles on the street, leading to a drop in real estate prices. Tassell publicly refuted those claims. She emphasised the NZPC's safe disposal of used needles and pointed out that ten pharmacies in the area also offered the needle exchange programme.[42] Nevertheless, the NZPC's attempts to stay on the premises were ultimately unsuccessful. In August 1995, two months after the centre opened, the Tauranga District Council planning committee voted that the centre breached resource consent and ordered for it to be closed down.[43] The backlash and eviction led Tassell to conclude that '[m]aybe being upfront about the centre's activities was not such a good idea'.[44]

Outside the networks

The discourse on community support through groups like the NZPC can potentially overshadow the voices of those who were not engaged in activism. Some people, especially those who undertook sex work alongside other forms of employment, had well-established social networks outside of the sex industry and did not seek peers or mentors engaged in sex work. Others were simply not aware of the NZPC or that such support was available.

David is one of the few people I interviewed who did not seek out colleagues in the industry during the fourteen years he worked as an independent escort. David grew up in a small North Island farming community in the 1970s. He was aware of 'at least one sex worker in town, but of course it was a woman so I thought only women could be sex workers'. David inadvertently started sex work in 1982 at the age of twenty. He remembered 'having fun' with an older man in Wellington, 'and afterwards he paid me, and I thought, Oh cool, I can get money and have sex. That's really cool.' David decided to pursue the business opportunity

and subsequently developed a clientele through word of mouth and by advertising as a 'young man seeking generous gentlemen' in the *Evening Post* and *Dominion*. He explained:

> At that time, you couldn't put a phone number in with the personals, you had to go to your box number at the newspaper. So, you had to go into the newspaper on a daily basis and collect any mail that arrived. And that would have the clients' details and everything and then you'd give them a ring, which could be quite harrowing because sometimes it could be the wife that answers.

David maintained his full-time job with a government department and met clients in the evenings and on weekends at a separate flat he rented in the city. He offered 'just vanilla stuff' for the first six years before he moved to Melbourne and learned to be a BDSM master. After he returned to Wellington in 1991, David hired a room in a cruise club and started to offer BDSM. He stopped sex work in 1996 to avoid being forced to register his details with the police.

David described concealing sex work as of little consequence in comparison to concealing his sexuality. When asked whether he found the secrecy to be isolating, he responded: 'In a way, but no more isolating than being gay and not being able to tell anybody because you could get fired, you could get evicted. All that sort of thing.' David certainly had first-hand experience with homophobia. His 'extremely homophobic' father had vocally opposed National MP Venn Young's 1974 campaign to decriminalise sex between adult men, and disowned David several years later when his flatmate 'outed' him during a visit. David had grown up aware of his father's prejudice and anticipated his hostility as an inevitability. He added, 'But I had the support network around me so that didn't really matter.'

That David could draw on support within his community refutes any suggestion that he felt isolated because of his lack of engagement with sex worker networks. 'I was a member of the Dorian Society, and I had good friends right throughout the LGBT community without any issue. It was good.' Based in Wellington, David had access to a thriving gay community. The Dorian Society opened in 1962 as Wellington's first gay male venue. It soon evolved into a social group that, gender studies scholar Chris Brickell argues, 'provided one entrée into the homosexual world for those without

extensive private friendship networks and, in turn, encouraged men to develop a sense of identity around their sexuality'.[45]

David became acquainted with the NZPC when he was involved in lobbying for Associate Minister of Health Katherine O'Regan's anti-discriminatory provisions in the Human Rights Act 1993. The provisions aimed to protect people against discrimination based on their sexuality and HIV status.[46] David joined the Collective as a volunteer in the late 1990s – a couple of years after he had stopped sex work – and has remained an active contributor to the NZPC's research and writing.

Unlike David, who managed to secure a support network within the LGBT community, Allie expressed regret at her lack of awareness of the NZPC when she started working in the early 1990s. Allie left school at the age of fourteen and connected with a couple of other teenage girls who worked from the streets of Christchurch. Their group soon expanded to include fourteen or fifteen teenagers who sought shelter in abandoned buildings and houses near Latimer Square. For Allie and her peers, sex work was solely a means of survival. She explained:

> We smoked so many drugs and just drank, and we looked after each other by sex working. And we'd get the customers to get us a motel room for the night, or three nights depending on how much we made between us. And they'd buy us our alcohol and so we'd have our stash of alcohol [laughs], smokes and food. And we fed each other that way, by sex working.

Allie spoke of their vulnerability on the streets as a time when '[w]e had no advice. We had absolutely nothing back then.' She and her friends often found themselves at the mercy of men who likely recognised their power over the intoxicated young teenagers, who were working to survive. Allie described the clients as 'disgusting'. She elaborated:

> I can't remember a really nice client. I remember thinking, Why are we doing the things we're doing? I don't know. But I think it was when we were drunk . . . I don't know why we ended up having such creepy clients. Like I honestly can't remember having a nice client back on the streets. In the parlours, they were way different. Yeah. But I remember back on the streets it was horrible. Like basically almost raping.

> The majority of the time it was rough, and hard, and sore. But yeah, we just did things to live, to survive.

Allie's brief reference to the 'way different' clients she encountered in massage parlours foreshadowed her later discussion about being in a more empowered position to assert her boundaries. This was a marked shift from her time on the street, when 'I had no rights back then. And I thought that was the norm.'

Allie explained that while she and her peers had little safe sex education, they received free condoms from two social workers who ran a youth van in town. They trusted the social workers but were more suspicious of the NZPC:

> We used to jump the fences every time we'd see NZPC coming towards us 'cause we had no idea the lady with the suitcase walking towards us [laughs] was there to actually help us and give us that advice. Because the amount of broken condoms that I had, and I'd caught chlamydia a couple of times too, and the roughness of sex, I thought that was normal. I had no idea sex was nice, or that you get pleasure from it.

Allie and her peers gravitated towards the street at a time when concerns about young people involved in sex work gained national attention. In January 1996, the Christchurch *Press* reported that people as young as thirteen were exchanging sex for money in Latimer Square and other parts of Christchurch.[47] NZPC health educators attributed the increase in teenagers on the street to the high levels of poverty and the men who purposely sought underage workers. The NZPC was especially concerned that the teenagers did not consider themselves to be sex workers; in most cases, they had simply accepted chance offers of small amounts of money from men for sexual activities.[48] Consequently, they were likely not engaged with sex worker networks, or up to date about sexual health measures.[49]

Such concerns were not limited to Christchurch. That same summer, the New Zealand Police and the NZPC raised concerns about young teenagers turning to sex work in South Auckland and in Wellington as a means of survival, and to pay for recreational activities that children from wealthier backgrounds enjoyed.[50] Concerns about young people working from the streets of major cities escalated over the following years.

In 2000, Diane Black, a Māori warden and head of the Counties Manukau District Māori Council, estimated that one hundred people, including adolescents, solicited from the streets in Papatoetoe for small sums of money, food or cigarettes.[51]

Mainstream media reports primarily focused on young cisgender girls. Yet the NZPC also raised concerns that gay male and trans teenagers were forced into sex work for survival after being rejected by their parents. In 2001, NZPC male sex worker project coordinator Calum Bennachie stated that he knew of at least ten teenagers in Wellington who engaged in 'survival sex'. While teenagers over the age of sixteen were eligible to apply for an emergency independent youth benefit, many were deterred by the lengthy and intimidating application process and felt ashamed to disclose their situations.[52]

Allie worked on the street for two years, until she was sent to Christchurch Community Corrections for burglary and assault. She found jail 'really easy. I don't know. . . . We were the younger ones, we were looked after, I ended up doing this amazing outdoor education course. I had a really good time [laughs]. I think that's another thing where I found a family and they looked after us.' She returned to prison at the age of eighteen, when she was sentenced to nine months at Christchurch Women's Prison for possession to supply. After her release, she and her partner found a flat to rent and she did not return to street-based work.

Allie spoke of the stark differences between clients she met on the streets as a teenager, and those she encountered in her early twenties. She returned to the industry for a year at the age of twenty-one in 1999, when a friend introduced her to massage parlour work. She described her shift in autonomy:

> That's when I found out the clients were gentler [laughs] and nicer. They treat you better and if they were rough, we could say, 'No!' I didn't even know we could do that. I had no idea we could say 'no' or whatever back when I was younger 'cause I was so used to what I was treated like when I was a young girl. That was my norm. But when I got into brothel work, I was like, Ooh this is different, and I feel a lot safer. I had one horrible client, a couple of horrible clients, but I was treated *way* nicer in a brothel.

An important turning point for Allie was meeting Anna and Tracy, the two NZPC outreach workers she had previously avoided, during one of her shifts at Atami Bath House:

> We were in this small room with one bed and that's what they used to call the changing room. So, there was me and my friend, and she used to work on the streets with me as well. So anyway, there was just us two there and then I remember someone yelling out, 'NZPC's here!' And they walked straight into the changing room and we both looked at each other, my friend and I were like [gasps], 'Who are you?' [laughs]. And I noticed her straight away because Anna used to have green hair, or the red hair, or the blue hair, and she had her hair dyed bright pink. . . . And they explained to us who they actually were. And then I thought, That's me. I'm going to be like that one day. I want to do what she does instead of working.

Allie achieved her goal. She started working in outreach in the early 2010s and has liaised with sex workers across the Waikato, Bay of Plenty, Gisborne and Taranaki regions. Her subsequent work with outreach perhaps shaped her disappointment that she was not aware of the support the NZPC offered when she worked on the street.

Ramifications of being outed

While sex worker activists were gaining visibility during the late twentieth century, people were still forced to work with a high level of secrecy. The illegal status of sex work, coupled with the prejudice attached to working in the industry, meant individuals often had to conceal their occupations from friends and family members. For many, being 'outed' as a sex worker beyond the tight-knit networks they had developed could put them not only at risk of social ostracism, but also in imminent danger.

As a young mother supporting two small children, Allie was especially attuned to how her work could be used as a weapon against her. The consequences of being outed were severe. Allie's former partner found out about her work and immediately informed her mother, who phoned her at the parlour. Allie explained: 'This is how nasty she is. She was like, "I'm going to tell your kids every little thing about you." And then she hung up

on me. And I was just like, "Ooh." So, it went downhill after that.' Allie had no doubt her mother would tell her preschool-aged children about her work. It was the catalyst for a downward spiral:

> My mum found out and she went for my kids. And she got my kids taken off me because I was sex working and my partner was smoking drugs, as in weed. I ended up trying to fight, and I got nowhere, and I got my kids taken off me. So, I started drinking really heavily after that, like really heavily after that.

As a young Māori mother, her position was perhaps especially perilous. State agencies' disproportionate removal of tamariki Māori from their parents compared to non-Māori children, and the intergenerational trauma such removals have created, have come under recent attention.[53] But Allie's story later took a positive turn. She and her partner moved out of Christchurch and found 'the life out of the rut'. She regained custody of one of her sons and described active lives: 'We have turned our life around [laughs] and we've both been clean. And we take our son, he does mountain biking, we go to the waterfalls, we're both smoke-free now, we travel.'

The prejudice attached to sex work was not limited to the wider public, nor did it immediately subside with law reform. Frankie's testimony highlights frictions within the adult entertainment industry, in particular the tensions between sex workers and strippers. Chapter Four outlines Frankie's career shift from working at an Auckland strip club from the age of eighteen, in 1977, to a brief spell of massage parlour work in 2003. From the outset, Frankie was open about her work with selected friends, some of whom also worked in parlours. She described her mum as her main confidante, noting that 'you need someone who's gonna love you no matter what, and my mum is definitely that for me'. She also reflected fondly on the camaraderie she shared with other workers on the daytime shifts: 'My friend and I would usually be reading, so I have this vision of her in this long gown lying on her stomach reading Harry Potter [laughs]. So, we would just lounge around a bit until a client would come through.' And yet she felt compelled to conceal her new job from her former colleagues at Showgirls: 'I was like, "Oh God, if any of the dancers find out, that's it! I'll be ostracised."'

Such opposition to those who 'crossed the line' into sex work appears to have arisen out of the need for individuals to constantly assert

their boundaries with strip club patrons who propositioned them for sex. Showgirls was located below a massage parlour:

> There was so much stigma that as a dancer you were very firm with men because you would always get propositioned. You would say, 'No. I'm not a prostitute.' And so you'd shame them from trying to convince you to have sex with them by also shaming women who did: 'No, I don't do that. I don't have sex, I'm just a dancer. If you want to have that, go upstairs.' So, this culture was created which we call 'whorephobia' now, but that definitely existed then. But a lot of that was protection of us: 'I don't do that.' So, protection to the other girls, 'I don't do extras.' Protection to the men, 'I don't do extras.' You know, it was to keep them at arm's length. But there were always girls that do extras. But also, they were undercutting our money [laughs].

Undercutting others' potential earnings by offering less widely accepted services could mean being an outcast, as explored further in Chapter Three. In the context of strip clubs, the intense competition can be attributed to deprofessionalisation in the 1980s, whereby strippers were no longer considered entertainers who were paid per shift, but rather service providers who earned tips for private dances and were subject to bar fees and other expenses.[54]

The divisions were perhaps also fuelled by the lack of contact between workers in the two types of venues. Despite working below a massage parlour for six years, Frankie and her colleagues rarely saw the parlour employees. She attributed their apparent absence to the prejudice attached to sex work and explained:

> We'd sometimes see them if they were outside. But whereas we would quite proudly stand outside and smoke cigarettes in barely anything, you would never see the girls upstairs do that. They had far more decorum to be honest [laughs]. But I think part of that would be the stigma, to be standing out on the street when you're working in a brothel, that's like on display. We didn't even really think about that. For us, that was like encouraging people in [laughs].

As mentioned, Frankie temporarily left Showgirls and worked in a massage parlour for six months in 2003. Her concerns about her colleagues at Showgirls discovering her work materialised when she was asked to cover a shift at Penthouse, the massage parlour that was located above her former club. She explained:

> I was so nervous, and I snuck in the back door. And one of the hostesses came up to get towels and saw me and I was like, Oh no, I've been outed! I still to this day have no idea if she told anyone, obviously. And it was just this fear of, Oh no, everyone's gonna know! It's so strange, isn't it? It's all the same sex industry, but there was such a line for some of us. I have to say some of us because for some there probably wasn't, but it was that we'd been taught that there was a line and if you cross that . . . you know.

Frankie left the massage parlour when she entered a new relationship and returned to work at Showgirls. She described the transition:

> I was scared of how that was going to be taken, to be honest, because I knew there was a chance that people had found out that maybe I'd jumped the fence and I'd get treated differently.
> *Did they?*
> Yeah, a couple knew, but I can't from memory remember them. . . . Oh actually, no, I lie! There were two. There were two girls who followed me from stage to stage and gave me a hard time. But ironically, one of those girls has been my best friend for the last fifteen years [laughs]. Basically, just giving me a hard time. Just intimidating, like they'd say little things. But it was more just making themselves known and that they knew that I'd come from Femmes.

While Frankie's testimony emphasised the divide between strip club and massage parlour work, boundaries between the two sectors of the industry were not always so clear. Before the rise of massage parlours in the 1970s, strip clubs were popular venues for sex workers to meet and solicit prospective clients.[55] Trans icon Carmen famously stripped at the Purple Onion in Wellington and took patrons she picked up at the venue to

the 'unlit side alleys of the area' for sex.[56] Another Purple Onion employee from the 1970s described working as a 'spot stripper'. She earned $5 per dance before 'loitering and picking up customers after that, and that's where you really made your money'.[57] Accepting extras at strip clubs appears to have become less acceptable by the end of the 1970s. In 1979, one stripper from the Pink Pussycat on Karangahape Road, which had opened in 1963 as New Zealand's first dedicated strip club, asserted, 'None of the girls now are into prostitution. When the strip clubs first opened, they were because they were so low paid they had to earn more money but it's changed now.'[58] Not everyone could rely on their income from stripping. Trans workers in particular supplemented their income from Wellington's Club Exotique with street-based sex work in the 1970s and 1980s.

The secrecy around sex work was so profound, it could endure even in death. Cherida described her 'silent grief' when a former friend and colleague passed away. She remembered her friend's acute fear that any association with Cherida would signal her past involvement in the industry: 'She'd been really nervous about us even being friends when she met her husband, and she didn't want me to be meeting him because I was out as a worker, and she was really ashamed, and it was really hard for her.' Cherida's friend passed away in 2020. She attended the funeral online via Zoom, as per COVID-19 restrictions, and described the emotional struggle of feeling forced to conceal their time together:

> I was so heartbroken for her. I watched her funeral online, they'd streamed it. And there was no discussion at all of sex work and nobody knew about it. But it was really awful 'cause I really wanted to send her daughter a message about how much she loved her and how much she spoke about her, and I watched her funeral, and she was just the same person as what she was to us, but it would just out her to say anything. So yeah, it's quite weird having this kind of silent grief trapped away over here where you couldn't share it with the people that loved her. I don't know, it's quite weird.

The oral testimonies add further depth to understandings of the late twentieth century as a period when attitudes towards sex and sex work became more open. Some sex workers made significant headway towards transforming stereotypes about those working in the industry. They presented

a united front as proactive and informed individuals who were willing and able to fight for their rights. Yet such activism took a significant financial and emotional toll on those involved. The retribution the NZPC faced from police for its openness – despite such openness being essential to engaging with the wider sex worker population and fulfilling their contract with the Department of Health – captures the organisation's fraught position at a time when most elements of sex work were criminalised. The following chapter examines the other side of community building: not through organised activism like the NZPC, but through finding mentors and friends.

CHAPTER THREE

Finding Mentors and Community Building

Allan's career as a sex worker started in the early 1980s. The fourteen-year-old had stopped attending school – he had previously been expelled from his primary and intermediate schools – and had run away from home several times. Allan had spent his entire life grappling with being adopted and with the negative messages 'from religion, and from TV, and from society' about his sexuality. Nevertheless, as he explained, 'you've got all this misbehaviour going on and nobody looking into, well, why is this child acting out?' His mother eventually 'brought in the police and youth aid officers' who placed Allan into Ōwairaka Boys' Home: 'I'd heard so many stories about that place. Oh my God. They put you in the secure unit, which was like a little jail, to begin with. And then they had an open house area. . . . as soon as I was put up there I was out and ran away.'

Allan spent the following six months sharing flats with older teenagers on the North Shore and in Herne Bay before moving into a flat with university students on Auckland's Ponsonby Road. His neighbours lived in run-down boarding houses, and it was 'a totally different Ponsonby back then'. It was there that he met Sheila, the tall, confident, and 'really cool'

eighteen-year-old who became his first mentor in the industry. Sheila came from a strong Māori whānau in Hawke's Bay and had moved to Auckland to study at university alongside her siblings. She was also transgender – the first person Allan met who was 'openly anything other than straight' – and worked part-time on the streets. Sheila 'took me under her wing'. She taught him how to identify cars that might be looking for business, and how to approach and interact with clients. Importantly, she protected him from the 'older queens [who] could be quite heavy and they didn't like new people coming on the street. You had to have their permission and all that kind of stuff. And Sheila looked after me and made them leave me alone.'

Allan was one of several interviewees who attributed their survival in the sex industry to mentors who introduced them to other sex workers and guided them in their dealings with clients. The importance of support networks within the industry cannot be overstated considering the public condemnation, harassment and violence sex workers continued to deal with across the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The support they developed within their networks was essential to their emotional and physical safety. Yet finding their places in these networks was complex. This chapter first considers narrators' memories of their mentors who advised them on the unwritten rules of sex work. Following these rules helped them not only to gain acceptance from their peers, but also to avoid violence, sometimes perpetrated by other workers. Their testimonies highlight their pride in being part of close-knit collectives. It then focuses on narrators' emphases on the street scene as a space where they gained exposure to others with whom they could explore their gender and sexuality. Finally, this chapter examines advocacy among sex workers in massage parlours. It considers both the tensions between employees and the support they gave one another amidst complaints of exploitation by managers.

The significance of peer support was most clear in interviews with trans and takatāpui narrators who worked on the street. Several of these narrators did not set out to undertake sex work. Rather, like many of those who came before them, they gravitated towards the inner cities in search of others with whom they could identify.[1] They attested to the friendship and acceptance they experienced within their newfound queer communities that congregated on the streets and in adjacent bars and coffee lounges. Their testimonies disturb popular depictions of street-based workers, particularly trans Māori and Pacific individuals, being resigned to 'tout[ing] for business on the littered kerbs of Auckland's Karangahape Road' and other inner-city

streets.[2] Rather, the street became a site of community building and its value extended beyond monetary gain.

This is not to downplay the transphobia and racism that certainly limited these individuals' employment options both outside of and within the industry.[3] Several interviewees attested that parlour managers almost exclusively employed slim Caucasian cisgender women during this period. Some trans workers secured jobs at local strip clubs; yet this was an option only for those who, according to Georgina Beyer, were 'extraordinarily good looking and "unspring"', meaning they could not be identified as trans.

This is also not to romanticise the notion of a community. As historian Will Hansen points out, 'community by its very definition includes some and excludes others'.[4] His research into trans resistance in 1970s and 1980s Aotearoa identifies divides between different trans communities. Specifically, membership-only clubs like Hedesthia – the first trans peer-led group on record in New Zealand, established in Wellington in 1972 – 'maintained a strict vetting system' and appeared to exclusively comprise middle-class Pākehā members.[5] The group emphasised respectability and encouraged members to act as '"normal", productive members of society' with families and secure jobs, in order to be accepted.[6] Yet doing so potentially marginalised individuals they deemed unacceptable, namely those who undertook sex work.[7] By contrast, Māori and Pacific trans women created and inhabited public spaces like nightclubs and late-night coffee houses. A 'loose network' of trans men and transmasculine people also existed through which they shared information and support.[8]

The unwritten rules of sex work

Newcomers learned invaluable lessons from their mentors. They were especially forbidden from discrediting the scene by stealing from clients and attracting police attention, undercutting others' prices, and encroaching on others' clientele. The development of mentors – and especially the practice of experienced workers allowing newcomers to solicit alongside them – is especially noteworthy considering the mutual support many workers fostered while also appreciating the competition they posed for business.

Amber spoke of the importance of having a mentor during her stint as a ship girl from late 1982 to when she moved overseas in March 1983. She attributed her survival in the scene to a more experienced ship girl who looked out for her. As a teenager 'fresh out of boarding school' with 'a bit

of a plum in my mouth when I spoke', she certainly needed the support. Amber grew up in a small town and moved to Wellington shortly after she finished high school. She gained a job in a blue-collar industry, but 'really hated it'. It was a 'very sexist environment. There was a lot of covert sexual harassment and just vulgarity.' Amber subsequently contacted Lea, a family friend from her home town, whom she heard had transitioned and was working as a ship girl in Wellington. With Lea's approval, Amber became one of the few cisgender Pākehā ship girls she remembered working with Japanese seafarers. They were much more generous than the Russian sailors other Pākehā women favoured. Lea guided Amber in her dealings with clients and, most importantly, with other ship girls. She was 'so lovely, she really made sure that nothing dangerous happened to me'.

Japanese vessels had been fishing for snapper off the coast of New Zealand since the late 1950s but did not start coming into port (other than for emergencies) until the end of the following decade.[9] In May 1967, the two governments signed a 'phase out agreement', whereby Japanese vessels agreed to gradually withdraw from New Zealand's exclusive 12-mile fishing zone, leading to 'greater cooperation over a wide front between Japanese and New Zealand companies and industry and governmental bodies'.[10] Small tuna vessels were among the first to make regular port calls in Wellington, Auckland and Lyttelton in 1968 for repairs and to shelter from the weather. They were followed by an increasing fleet of squid boats the following year, which reportedly continued to grow into the 1980s.[11] The oral histories suggest the opportunities for ship girls peaked in the late 1970s and 1980s. The demise of the ship scene has been attributed to a combination of tighter regulations from the mid-1980s, which meant people could no longer wander the ports, and the 'increasing containerisation of shipping', which meant there were smaller crews and a tighter turnaround time.[12] In Auckland, the redevelopment of the Ferry Building and Customs Street area contributed to the decline of the scene.[13] The decline also coincided with the withdrawal of Japanese vessels in the 1990s amidst Japan's prolonged economic recession, often referred to as 'the lost decade'.[14]

For the most part, Amber depicted an idyllic situation as a ship girl. Through Lea, she met seamen – whom they referred to as tāne (men) rather than clients (which they considered a 'very posh' term) – at Wellington's Sunset Strip nightclub, managed by community leader Chrissy Witoko, or at parties hosted by one of the local women:

> Basically, how it worked was, Lea knew everything to do, and I learned how to do this. So, what she would do is look up the *Evening Post* or the *Dominion* and that would have the shipping schedule in the back of the paper. And that would say what ships were in town. So, she would have a tāne and she would ring up the Harbour Board to get the ship's phone number, and then she would ring them up and speak to them in Japanese and ask for her guy. And then she would see whether he had any friends that wanted a girlfriend. And that's how it would work. And then she would take me on. I'd rock on up with my little ringlets [laughs] like a little innocent, and we would basically sit around in the ship's mess and drink. And sometimes we would go to the Sunset Strip which was on Cuba Street. Like, say for example if we didn't have a tāne on the off chance, and when Lea was away or stopped doing it, then I would just go to the Sunset Strip by myself. And also I made friends with some of the other ladies. So, I'd ring them up and say 'Oh, you going to the Set? You going to the Set tonight?' And they'd say, 'Yeah, yeah.' 'What time?' 'Oh, I'm going there at 7.30.' 'Okay, I'll meet you up there,' or 'I'll come around to your place first.' And we'd rock on up to the Set and there'd be all these tables with Japanese sailors.[15]

Being a ship girl involved partnering, or 'boxing off', with an individual sailor for the duration of their time in port, rather than negotiating a specific rate for a one-off service as was common practice in other parts of the industry. Amber's tāne often stayed overnight at her house. The arrangement allowed her to maintain her day job and 'live a normal life'. She explained, 'You were sleeping at night just like normal people, it's not like you were up pounding the streets or anything till two in the morning and then you had to go to work.' The apparently exclusive arrangement between the ship girl and her tāne also carried risks. Amber noted that 'those sailors, even though they paid us, believed that we were their only girlfriends. So that was a bit tricky if there was another ship in town.'

Amber was certainly attuned to the dangers of being a ship girl. She preferred to stay landbound and only occasionally went on board to socialise with seafarers and other workers. The high, rickety staircase to the cargo ships – the fishing boats rarely had room for onboard gatherings – meant

that 'getting on and off these boats, you really felt like you were taking your life in your hands'. The danger of the boat itself paled in comparison to the risk of violence from the other ship girls, who could be 'real loose cannons':

> The Japanese guys were perfectly safe, it was really the volatile other girls that weren't safe. And that's why it was much safer if you had contacts and that's why there were so many families there, you kind of needed a bunch of people to always have your back. You couldn't just rock on up and decide you were going to be a ship girl.

Amber stood out as 'quite fair, and a freckly little light-haired girl'. She concluded, 'If I hadn't had these trans ladies looking after me, I would have been totally screwed.'

Notwithstanding its complexities, Amber depicted the ship girl scene as 'very, very, down to earth'. They rejected the use of working names, which were common in other parts of the industry; rather, 'you just used your real name. That would be really kind of pretentious if you tried to give yourself a name.' Above all, stealing from a tāne or taking another ship girl's tāne were the ultimate crimes:

> There were basically two rules which you could get yourself bashed up for if you didn't obey them. So, one of them was 'Don't roll [steal from] a tāne'. So, you're not allowed to steal from anyone 'cause it *will* get back to someone and then they will come and give you the bash. And then the other rule was 'Don't steal someone else's tāne'. So that was pretty tricky if you didn't know who belonged to who. So that's why you really needed someone like Lea who knew everyone, and who everyone belonged to, and who you could ask. But if you asked them, 'Kanojo aru?' which literally means 'Is there a girl?' but basically means 'Have you got a girlfriend?' they would always say 'No', because they just would. And that's dangerous because you might end up getting bashed up. I mean [ship girls] fought like men; they were rough women. And there were whole families of them. There were aunties and nieces and mums and daughters that worked, and grandmas. It's actually very common in the sex industry, but

> it's a well-kept secret because there are allegations of pimping. But it wasn't pimping, no one was doing it involuntarily. And it's really bad to do that, because you don't bring your family into it. If you're attacking another girl, you don't bring her family up. But some people did, some people would ring up CYFS [Child, Youth and Family Services]. 'Cause of course it was illegal so you could get your kids taken off you. I didn't have any kids, but you could.[16]

While Amber sometimes socialised with other ship girls, she was less emphatic than other narrators on the importance of sex worker networks. Criminologist Jan Jordan's research highlights the close, family-like relationships that ship girls shared with one another and with seafarers. They celebrated Christmas together, had parties, and travelled locally and abroad, with sailors paying the ship girls' fares.[17] Some ship girls and seafarers had children together.[18]

Shareda also spoke of the importance of respecting the unwritten rules of sex work. She despised the work and did it only 'to pay the bills, that's all'. Shareda had lasting memories of standing outside for hours on cold, windy Wellington nights while being verbally assaulted by members of the public. She had much more positive memories of the friendships she developed with other street-based workers. Trans sex workers had developed a thriving community in Wellington by the time Shareda arrived in 1980. In the late 1960s, the Taumarunui-born Carmen Rupe returned to New Zealand from Sydney, where she had worked since the late 1950s, and quickly rose to prominence providing adult entertainment in Wellington. She opened her first establishment, Carmen's International Coffee Lounge, in 1967. It had a coffee lounge downstairs, where customers arranged their teacups and saucers to signal their sexual preferences, and bedrooms upstairs for workers to conduct business. She opened her second-most famous establishment, a striptease club called The Balcony, at the end of the decade. Carmen was part of a generation of entrepreneurial whakawāhine who established venues to cater to the LGBT community. This generation included her friend and fellow trans leader Chrissy Witoko, who in 1984 established the Evergreen Coffee House, which became a site for socialising and LGBT activism.[19] The significance of these venues cannot be overstated. Hansen examines how particular streets, nightclubs and late-night coffee houses fostered community building among working-class Māori and Pacific trans people.

In this vein, proprietors 'actively carved out public space for queer people to exist in an otherwise hostile terrain'.[20]

Shareda and her friends lived together in what they called households, which were spread across Mount Victoria and Brooklyn. She later set up a household on Colombo Street, Newtown, and developed a reputation for taking in 'strays' who had nowhere else to go. Trans women developed households in response to the prejudice that meant they were often rejected from prospective rental properties. Yet it was not mere necessity that brought them together. As Hansen identifies, households were also a 'source of strength, support and whanaungatanga, as well as an opportunity to have fun with friends'.[21] Additionally, Shareda and other interviewees described sharing meals with one another and going nightclubbing once they had earned enough money for the evening.

This practice was not limited to Wellington. Dominic Andrae highlights the development of such households in Auckland in the 1970s. One participant in Andrae's sociological research recounted seven or eight trans women living together in private houses they rented in inner-city suburbs surrounding Karangahape Road.[22] They described it as a time when 'the queens made the rules' on K Road, before the rising cost of rent forced many out of the inner city, with some moving to Australia.[23]

Shareda was in awe of the older workers. Yet gaining their acceptance took time. She was mindful to not overstep the boundaries, and to respect her place in the hierarchy that placed older women at the top:

> You never ever went up to an older queen in Wellington and said hello. She said hello in her time. So that was the rule amongst all the queens, that if you were new or younger, don't approach them, because you're either gonna get 'Get lost', or you're gonna get no reply at all. But eventually, eventually, you'd see one of the older girls and she'd be like, 'Hello, Shareda,' and I'm like, 'Hello.' They go, 'How you been?' 'All right.' 'Come down the back for coffee.' I said, 'Really?' They said, 'Come on. I wanna see what you've been up to.' So that's how you got to know them. They knew who you were, but you're not part of their group, you had to wait.

The oral histories offer insights into a particular moment and a particular culture in the history of sex work that many feel no longer

Carmen Rupe, Wellington, 1975. Photograph: Ans Westra, courtesy of {Suite} Gallery

exists. Across the interviews, narrators reflected fondly on the 1980s as a time when sex work was especially lucrative, clients were more grateful and less demanding, and there was a stronger sense of community on the streets. Some felt this solidarity declined with the increasing numbers of individuals shifting into private work in the wake of decriminalisation and advancements in technology enabling clients to book services online rather than venture into the CBD. Shareda traced this shift to the early 1990s, by which time most of her peers had moved to Australia. She explained, 'The street was changing. The coffee bar was gone, all those people from the scene were gone, and it was a new kind of generation taking over.'

Survival on the street

The communities that developed among street-based sex workers offered an important reprieve from the prejudice and threats of violence many faced from the wider public.[24] Further teasing out of these relationships offers insights into the extent to which evolving understandings of sex and sex work affected the lives of those working in the most visible part of the industry.

As mentioned, Allan was adopted shortly after his birth in 1967. He was raised in a predominantly Pākehā suburb where the only comments he heard about Māori, especially from his Māori adoptive mother, were 'not encouraging'. His testimony highlights how street-based sex work facilitated rare access to other Māori and LGBT people. Allan had started having sex with older men in public toilets at the age of eleven or twelve. While the men occasionally gave him money, he was not motivated by the payment: 'I think I would've done it for free anyway.' Meeting Sheila at the age of fourteen was a turning point. He learned about sex work as a financial opportunity, and, most importantly, 'all of a sudden meeting all these Māori on the street, all these trans workers, it was like, Oh my God, it's not just me, I'm not the only one like this.' Allan was not trans. He explained that the others embraced him as the only non-trans person they allowed to work alongside them from the top of Auckland's Queen Street and Karangahape Road. He also cross-dressed for some time to disguise himself when hiding from the police, and incidentally noticed how 'the work increased. *A lot*.' Allan spent the next four years working alongside his newfound friends – who varied in age from fourteen and fifteen to 'the king pins' in their forties and fifties, and potentially older – before he relocated to Wellington.

Allan's gratitude to his mentors was an undercurrent of the interview, especially regarding the way they protected him from the cohort of older workers in Auckland. Allan described these individuals as 'hard' and 'quite awful really. They'd stand over young queens and take their money off them and beat them up, all that sort of stuff.' Allan attributed such ruthlessness to their having transitioned at a time that was even more hostile towards trans people. He explained, 'They were very hard, but I believe it was a sign of the times, they had to be to survive in that kind of era.'

Despite the infighting, the street scene simultaneously became a close-knit community that rallied against violence from the wider public, as Allan attested:

> It was really weird: they were definitely like your whānau. They became your family; the whole scene was. I left home so I wasn't moving with schoolfriends because I wasn't really out at school. And so, once I left my area that I grew up in and once I discovered inner-city CBD Auckland I thought, Oh my God, this is more me. So, I cut those ties from my family and from anyone to do with school. And so, these people became your family. And even though people might be standing over each other, and taking their drugs, and rolling each other, and taking money, and there may be violence and stuff . . . if there was an attack from outside, they all really banded together and really looked after each other.

The value Allan placed on forming a family with the street-based workers was perhaps amplified by the feelings of disconnection he experienced before then. When questioned about whether it was difficult for him to sever his networks from school, he responded:

> I've never fit anywhere; I've never fit my whole life. I don't know whether it's an adoption thing, but I've never felt that I fit into anywhere. I never felt that I fit into my family because I was adopted. Even at school I grew up in a very predominantly Pākehā community and so I didn't fit in that too because I'm brown-skinned, although Dad was Pākehā. But then people go, 'Is that your father?' And I go, 'Yes.' And they'd go, 'But he's white.' So, I never kind of fit. Even at school

> I matured faster than my peers. I looked older than them, I was bigger than them, I got facial hair faster, all that sort of stuff. And even when I was still going to school, I found people my own age boring. And I always hung out with people older. And I was ahead of myself academically a year, so when I started Penrose High, I was twelve turning thirteen, everyone else was thirteen turning fourteen. But I didn't hang out with third formers, I just found them immature. I'd be hanging out with the fifth and sixth formers who were all sixteen, seventeen, they're all going to nightclubs. So, I started going to nightclubs in Auckland city as a twelve-year-old. But never ever kind of fit. I could hang with the naughty brown kids that were all being naughty and smoking up on the field. Then I could hang with the alternative punk rock Pākehā kids as well. And move in these different circles, but not quite be any of them if you know what I mean. And it wasn't until meeting the queer scene really that I was like, Oh my God, here's my tribe. Here are my people, this is me. That was cool.

Allan was not alone in his relief at finding a community with whom he could identify in regard to his sexuality. Sojourn described a 'typical suburban upbringing' in a small central North Island town in the 1970s and early 1980s. By age fifteen, Sojourn knew he was attracted to other men, and he placed an advertisement to meet men in *NZ Truth*. He remembered feeling 'scandalous' as a sixteen-year-old high school student who told the grown men he met in hotel rooms that he was twenty. Sojourn also instinctively stumbled across public toilets where men met other men for sex, but he refrained from approaching anyone out of fear that he would encounter one of his classmates. As he acknowledged, 'it never dawned on me that there might be other schoolmates in there cruising for sex as well'.

Outside of these liaisons, however, 'I had no one there that I could talk to about possibly having these feelings of same-sex attraction.' There were certainly thriving and visible gay communities in Aotearoa by the mid-1980s. The beginning of New Zealand's 'public and provocative' gay liberation movement has been traced to a 'fiery speech' Ngāhuia te Awekōtuku (then Volkerling) delivered at the University of Auckland in March 1972.[25] Twenty-three-year-old Ngāhuia had been selected by the New Zealand University Students' Association to undertake a United States government-funded tour

of American campuses. Yet she was denied a visa to enter the United States on account of her sexuality. Her subsequent speech urged people to be open about their sexualities and led to the formation of gay liberation groups in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch.[26] Like their British, American and Australian counterparts, activists in New Zealand urged other lesbians and gay men to challenge oppression and declare pride in their sexualities by coming out. The movement gained momentum over the next decade as activists publicly and collectively campaigned for an end to discrimination. The decriminalisation of sex between men under the Homosexual Law Reform Act 1986 was a significant milestone.

The mid-1980s was also the height of the HIV and AIDS epidemic. As Chapter Six outlines, gay activists pioneered safe sex education during this period, lobbied health officials for funding, and provided emotional support and practical assistance for people living with the virus. Yet despite the increasing unity and visibility of the gay community, it was still an unsafe time to come out. The heightened prejudice gay men faced in the early 1980s with the onset of HIV and AIDS, initially referred to as 'Gay-Related Immune Disease' by medical researchers and in the media, is well documented.[27] These prejudices continued despite the prohibition of discrimination based on sexuality and HIV status under the Human Rights Act in 1993. The negative messages Sojourn heard about same-sex attraction, especially among men, meant he understandably feared having his sexuality discovered.

Sojourn's entry to the sex industry came after he had completed a culinary qualification and moved to Wellington in 1986 at the age of eighteen. He joined a friend's netball team, which comprised solely Samoan fa'afafine players, and moved into his teammates' flat in Newtown shortly afterwards. Sojourn is Cook Islands Māori and Māori and identifies as takatāpui tāne and akava'ine, the latter a Cook Islands term for individuals of diverse genders and sexualities.[28] Nevertheless, his teammates embraced him as an honorary fa'afafine. He explained, 'When I first came out, I came out as fa'afafine because they were the first people that I identified with when I was trying to understand my sexuality.'

While he described being protected within his network, Sojourn was attuned to the divisions that existed as different groups maintained their territories on the streets of Wellington:

> The queen culture – we called ourselves queen – was very big and very strong. There was a *clear* divide between the Māori

> queens and the Island queens and the Pākehā queens. For the most part, the Māori and the Island queens got on because it was often to assert their place. Different parts of Vivian and Marion Streets were claimed by different queens. Usually, you had your own spot, and you didn't wander off onto somebody else's spot or you could expect to get, you know . . . into a fight. So, some of the Māori queens were really big, and really strong, and scary, and fierce. But the Samoan queens were even bigger, and stronger, and more fierce, and I always felt safe with them [laughs].

Others remembered more of a mix within these groups. Sojourn's heritage meant he was often questioned about his allegiance on the street:

> Some of the Māori queens used to say to me, 'Hey are you Samoan?' And I'd go, 'No I'm Māori and Cook Island.' They go, 'What are you hanging out with them for?' And I'd be like, 'Oh they're my sisters, I'm very close to them.' And they used to say, 'Well, you should be hanging out with your own, your Māori sisters.' I said, 'Oh well I love my Māori sisters, but these are the ones that have adopted me.'

Sojourn's comment about being adopted perhaps signals his respect for his Samoan sisters as people who were confident in their genders and sexualities. Sojourn had struggled with internalised homophobia growing up and explained how 'living with them really opened my eyes up to myself' and led to 'a bit of self-happiness and self-acceptance'. While he did not mention their ages, other interviewees described having a mentor or a 'drag mother', who was sometimes only marginally older than them. Renee remembered how her main mentor, Yvette, became 'what we call my drag mother. She showed me the ropes of everything, and how to do my makeup. She was an amazing makeup artist.' Despite their closeness in age, with Yvette only twelve days her senior, Renee described her as 'a real big mama to me'.

Many of the narrators proudly related how street-based sex workers would protect themselves and others from physical attacks. These stories both confirm the well-known narratives of the violence inflicted on trans sex workers by members of the public and the police, and position sex workers as assertive and capable individuals. Sojourn remembered:

> [Harassment] did happen a lot in Wellington. But a lot of those guys never got out of the car, they just threw all their anger and abuse, hurled it from the safety of their car. 'Cause they could speed off. Because a couple of times when it did get physical when some of these guys, or even if they were just walking in the street and hassling the girls, just getting smart, it would end up in a big brawl and you could guarantee that there would be blood everywhere, and it wasn't from the queens. It was the guys getting bashed up. Because they didn't anticipate that these – I mean they should have, some of them were gigantic – these women could beat them up. So, while there was a bit of violence and stuff happening, the queens also could look after themselves and look after each other. In saying that, often there were fights between the queens as well. That happened a lot too.

The protection of those on the street was perhaps especially important considering the lack of other avenues for redress. As Chapter One outlined, sex workers often felt police would be unlikely or unwilling to take any complaints of violence against them seriously.

For Kay'la, socialising with other trans street-based workers became the most memorable part of her work. A foundational member of the NZPC, she was instrumental in introducing other street-based workers to the Collective in the late 1980s. She had inadvertently started sex work at the age of thirteen in the mid-1970s and described the experience as 'hilarious!' She explained:

> I didn't like college much, so I used to skip college, walk three miles to the nearest town, which was Porirua, and I used to get picked up by guys. And then one or two of them started paying me. And I thought, Oh, you know, they're probably just giving me some money so I could catch the bus, what have you. But every single time. And it wasn't until I got a bit older, and I was about sixteen, seventeen-ish, I came into town and I met up with some of the working girls and I realised that's what they do. And then it clicked, Oh hell, I've been doing it all this time [laughs]. I should have charged more.

It is little surprise that Kay'la hated college. She remembered being tormented by one of her elder brothers and his friends, who attended the same school. They 'picked on me, bullied me, and beat me up after school, and that went on for a period of five years'. She concluded that the 'best thing I ever did, I think, was skip school and go over to the nearest town and start [laughs]. And I was getting paid.'

Kay'la started sex work as a profession at the end of the 1970s. She had accepted an invitation from Shareda to stay at her home for the weekend and 'meet the girls. And that's how I learned what they were doing.' Kay'la emphasised a lively community on the street with other workers:

> The lifestyle, oh, the lifestyle on the street was just amazing. I mean, nowadays you have people who go to work, save their money, and they could go out for about two hours of fun a week. Back then, we could do that every single damn night! But we had priorities. Priorities were [counts on fingers] rent, food, power, bills. So, say four jobs, one for your rent. Yeah, that's how it was done. Then you'd go home, hide your money, then you'd go back out. Fun time! And we worked at the back of a nightclub, and it's like two or three clubs within the same area. A small area. So, we had our own nightclub out on the street. And some of the girls would perform, doing either poi or on the corner singing a cappella. And it was just for us, but people who walked past would stop and go 'Ooh', you know, they'd stare, and they'd think they were buskers. It was fun. It was like a never-ending party.

The value Kay'la placed on being part of this community was not based solely on light-hearted fun and entertainment. She explained that she and the others formed 'our own best security agency' where they defended store assistants and other members of the public from anyone who was intoxicated and acted aggressive. She concluded: 'We were protectors, we wouldn't tolerate any kind of violence anywhere.'

The family Kay'la found among other street-based workers marked a clear departure from the one she had experienced growing up. Some of the narrators, including Renee and Sojourn in particular, remembered loving relationships with their birth families. Kay'la had the opposite experience.

She was born in Taranaki as the second-youngest of ten children and moved to Tawa, a suburb north of Wellington central, with her family shortly afterwards. She described her childhood as 'non-existent'. Her elder brothers continually beat her 'because I was different', and one brother attempted to kill her on three separate occasions. At the age of eleven, Kay'la's relatives across the street became her whāngai (foster or adoptive) family. She expressed her resentment at having to 'watch your own family get in the car, go off for our traditional beach lunch every week. They'd see me, turn their face, and drive off. Yep. And I was about eleven when that happened. And that went on for a while.' Her feelings of rejection were perhaps amplified by her understanding that, in response to her whāngai mother's request to take Kay'la from Tawa to Whangārei with her to live, 'without hesitation, [my birth mother] and my father said, "Yes, you can!"'

Kay'la's resilience was an undercurrent of the interview. She explained that, despite the relentless abuse from her brothers, 'I'm here, I'm over six foot three, so it never worked! Yeah, it's called stubbornness [laughs]. True instincts of a survivor.' This can be seen, too, in her decision to use her real name in this book and in other interviews:

> I had a slack education 'cause of what I was going through as a kid, bullying and all that. But now I can recycle, reconstruct, and refurbish computers, do websites, all of that stuff. I do catering for massive functions, I can do funding applications, things like that for City Council, which I've sort of been doing for the last few years, and not one of my projects has been denied funding. And that's not catering for, say, ten people, that's doing an event and catering for up to four hundred people in one go. . . . I think I was striving to prove myself to people, that there's nothing wrong with sex worker, trans, what have you. And it's why I say I don't want to be anonymous in interviews or whatever. My name is Kay'la. I've done enough TV, radio, newspaper, podcast, videos, interviews, whatever, I don't care. Hello, you can't miss me . . . [laughs]. So yeah, my thing is, if you want to know something just ask the question and you'll get the straight answer. And that's me, that's my personality. And I basically got that all through evolving through sex work.

Kay'la's emphasis on the skill set she developed through sex work, which translated into her success in other jobs, disturbs stereotypes that devalue working in the industry.

Advocacy and exploitation in massage parlours

Solidarity among sex workers was especially important considering the exploitation some endured from massage parlour managers. The lack of legal protection for employees in the sex industry prior to decriminalisation gave employers the power to fine workers, withhold payments, and terminate their employment without notice.[29] Workers were certainly cognisant of their lack of rights under the laws and their vulnerability.

Kelly remembered being vocal about such exploitation. Her entry into the sex industry came shortly after she moved to Australia at the age of twenty-seven in 1978. She gained a job as a receptionist at a local massage parlour before she 'jumped the fence' and decided to earn more money for herself and her young son by working in the rooms. She reflected on acting as a 'spokesperson for the ones who couldn't speak or felt they couldn't speak. So, I kind of made my hiccups in the industry [laughs] in making a few facts quite clear on behalf of other people.'

Kelly described being disturbed by some managers' expectations of staff after she returned to New Zealand in 1990. She remembered one parlour manager 'trained' new staff by requiring sex. She explained, 'I was in my thirties then, and I can remember saying to him, "I have worked now for a very long time. I am very aware of what I'm doing, I don't need to take you to the room to show you anything" [laughs]. And I said, "This won't be happening."' Similarly, in December 1989, one parlour employee wrote to *Siren* to express their outrage at their boss who not only required a nude massage and sex as part of the job interview, but also physically attacked a woman who refused to have sex with him. They queried how they could stop managers treating workers and clients like 'scum'.[30] Another contributor urged the editors of *Siren* to produce 'warnings for the beginner and under aged (young) workers' who started parlour work without training and were sexually harassed by their bosses.[31]

It was not only managers who felt entitled to sex from the women they employed. Kelly recounted another occasion where a parlour manager expected staff to perform sexual favours – free of charge – for the local police officers she had invited to their company picnic. The parlour managers made

this arrangement 'so they wouldn't get busted, and things would be kept all nice and calm'. She explained:

> And I remember saying to this woman that used to own this brothel, I said to her, 'If you're expecting me to do favours for them and you, you are wrong. It's not going to happen.' I said, 'I've been through corruption in Queensland, and I have never ever sold myself to please other people.' I made it quite clear on how I stand around things like that. And in my day, I was prepared to go to court if I had to put up with that bullshit. I was gobsmacked. I thought, Nah, this is not gonna happen for me! And I said to the girls then, 'You're stupid! Don't even do it!'

The scale of police corruption in Queensland, where police controlled the industry through verbal intimidation, physical violence, and fines, gained global attention in the late 1980s. The Commission of Inquiry into Possible Illegal Activities and Associated Police Misconduct, otherwise known as the Fitzgerald Inquiry, led to the downfall of several high-ranking police officers and politicians, with Queensland's premier, Joh Bjelke-Petersen, being tried for perjury and forced to resign.

Kelly's confidence and experience in the industry meant she was well placed to challenge managers. She was especially vocal about male parlour owners who made money off women's labour. It was common practice for clients to pay a set massage fee to the receptionist, and then negotiate extras with the worker. On occasions when the clients wanted a 'straight' massage without extras, the parlour received money while the worker remained unpaid:

> [The client] would only pay the door fee, which would be $40 at the door. That's what the brothel got.
> *And so that entitled him to a certain amount of time with the girl and a massage?*
> An hour of a nude massage and any extras that he may wish but he needs to negotiate with the girl.
> *So, you didn't get paid unless you negotiated?*
> Unless you negotiated a sexual activity with them, yes. So of course, you can imagine how that was because a lot of them

> didn't have the money. Why would they want the money? They've already seen you in the nude, they've already had you massaging them and body massaging them, and all this sort of thing, and quite often they've already ejaculated on the towel! And then, all of a sudden there is no money, and they've got what they needed. I couldn't believe it . . . I was quite horrified with how that was working. I was sort of like, 'Ahem excuse me, *straights*?' This had gone on for years in this country. I just was totally, totally gobsmacked.

The introduction of mandatory shift fees was another clear example of the power imbalance between parlour managers and employees. From 1990, an increasing number of massage parlours required masseuses to pay a set fee to cover cleaning costs and electricity. As one 'disillusioned worker' from Christchurch pointed out, however, workers were sometimes expected to clean the premises themselves for no payment.[32] In 1990, a group who identified themselves as 'The Brave Working Demons' of Christchurch wrote to *Siren* to enquire about their employment rights and declared their refusal to pay the shift fees should they be implemented. They condemned owners who 'want to charge us for the *privilege* of working every shift' as 'the lowest form of life imaginable'. They denounced these owners as pimps who were breaking laws against living off the earnings of sex work.[33]

Some parlour managers publicly criticised their competitors who introduced shift fees. One owner likened the fees to requiring office workers to provide their own typewriter and paper and pay to work each day.[34] Yet those opposed to shift fees appear to have been in the minority. Over the next couple of years, shift fees became commonplace across parlours, with dire consequences for workers. In May 1991, one contributor to *Siren* bemoaned the decline of the sex industry as 'once an extremely lucrative business' that was 'now upon extremely hard times'. The introduction of shift fees and fines meant it '*costs* some women to go to work'.[35] In addition, in 1992, some parlour workers in Hamilton reported that owners withheld money from credit card payments for more than six weeks under the false claim that it took that long for the money to be processed. Other managers reportedly kept money paid via credit card 'in lieu of shift fees'.[36]

Opposition to the introduction of shift fees was located within broader concerns about the exploitation of parlour employees. In April 1995, one former parlour worker reported, 'Things are in a serious state of affairs

when the Madams. Bosses etc. are more abusive to the working girls than the clients ever could be.' She shared one instance when a parlour madam gave her home address to a client without her permission, and other occasions when shift fees or fines 'suddenly seem to be added to if you've had a good week, or an all-nighter'.[37] By the end of the decade, many parlour managers also implemented fines for being late or being sick, or for breaking the dress code.[38] Additionally, newly hired masseuses were often required to pay the manager a bond of between $200 and $500, which was rarely returned to them upon leaving the establishment.[39] As Catherine Robinson, the then coordinator of NZPC Auckland, concluded: 'I can't think of any other job where you'd pay to come and work for yourself.'[40] The cumulative fines meant some left the industry in debt to parlour owners.[41]

Mary spoke of parlours' justification of shift fees and her concerns about workers' safety during her tenure as a massage parlour manager in Wellington from 1996 to 2002, and again from 2003 to 2005. Mary described a happy, working-class Catholic upbringing with her parents and four elder brothers in Wellington in the 1960s. She remembered being moved by stories about the biblical figure Mary Magdalene at school, and while she had minimal understanding of sex at the time, 'It seems like all my life I've always known I would be involved in the sex industry.' Mary made several attempts to enter the industry. At the age of eighteen, she and a friend 'wanted to earn lots and lots of money and own a house in Mission Bay overlooking the ocean [laughs]'. After an evening of drinking together, they visited Peaches and Cream, a parlour in Auckland, but left the moment they read a sign that stated, 'All massages done fully nude'. Mary subsequently applied for and was offered receptionist jobs at various massage parlours in New Zealand and later in the UK. She received other competitive job offers as a restaurant manager before starting any of these roles, 'so once again I didn't do the sex industry thing'.

In 1996, Mary moved to Wellington 'and ended up finally starting my career' in the sex industry at the age of thirty-five. Within a few weeks, she was managing the two largest parlours in the Wellington region. As a manager, Mary 'had to be beyond reproach' and maintain a distance from clients. A couple of years into her role, however, she agreed to have sex with one parlour client 'just to know what it was like, just to say I'd done it. I'm one of those people that like to do things once, [and] if I really enjoy it then I might do it again.' She described the encounter as a single occurrence at his home, and 'for me it was one of those things I'd done once [and] I didn't need to do it again.'

Out of a desire to make the industry safer for parlour workers, Mary wrote training manuals for new workers, which covered 'all the safety things, how to treat their clients, right down to specifics about cleaning up after a job' and offered verbal guidance on dealing with clients. She remembered a peer from the NZPC telling her that 'you've set some new standards in the industry and other parlours are having to pull their socks up'. Mary's testimony highlights a tension between her acknowledgement that fining workers was widely considered exploitative, and her memories of feeling justified in doing so as a parlour manager. She described her frustration at trying to organise a roster to include enough workers to suit the anticipated number of clients, while making sure there would be enough work for everyone:

> I remember being in that position of fining girls and being so frustrated and so stressed out trying to make it all work for everybody; trying to have the right number of people there and make it all happen that quite often you felt quite justified fining. Because it's like, I work my arse off to try and make this work for everybody, not just for me. I turn up, I'm always here for my shifts. Obviously, I didn't have the same level of secrecy in my life. I'd tell everybody I knew what I did, so I didn't have to hide anything. But it was a really, really frustrating situation. So, when I look back on it now, it is fairly horrendous and I hate the thought of fining anybody, but I did sometimes feel justified with girls who would consistently not show up.

Advocacy from parlour managers was essential to workers' safety, but it does not appear to have been widespread. Mary remembered some receptionists' apparent nonchalance about the safety of the staff: 'You're dealing with people's lives in a brothel, which was something that some receptionists, you just could not get it through to them, it was amazing. They'd send girls into all sorts of dodgy situations.' These situations included booking outcalls with men who were featured in their 'dud book' for being abusive to workers. She explained: 'You get receptionists who will look through dud books and go, "was abusive to three girls". And you see a note written in a dud book like that and think, Well, who sent the second two anyway?' Several parlours tried to protect workers by appointing a driver

to escort the worker to the client's home or motel room, or asking them to phone the parlour once they arrived at the location to confirm they felt safe.

Mary also emphasised how the secretive nature of the industry protected abusive receptionists and managers. She explained that 'those girls often are too terrified to tell anybody. So, a lot of stuff you find out well after the fact.' She concluded that the sex industry:

> attracted – probably still does – a lot of often not such good people. Like I said earlier, any institution, it's almost an institution working in a massage parlour. And the position of a receptionist or a manager in a massage parlour can attract power-hungry, abusive people who want to prey on people who are more vulnerable, which are young or inexperienced sex workers who don't have the ability to information-share because they don't tell people what they do. So, no one says, 'Oh God, don't work for that woman', or, 'Oh man, have you heard about such and such a place? You can go there, and they really look after you, and they're really good to you, and the clients are nicer.' All these sorts of things.

The 1990s witnessed an increase in individuals pursuing independent escort work. This shift away from the parlours was perhaps a response to what one writer to *Siren* described as 'bullshitting management with money addictions' who retained increasingly large portions of the money they received for the workers' time.[42] The writer emphasised their respect for independent workers who have the power to set their hours and their fees, and in doing so, 'cu[t] out the greedy management – these bosses are what are pushing these ladies to go it alone'. Those who did move into street-based work cited the benefits of being their own boss, choosing their dress codes, and deciding which acts to perform with which clients, whereas '[p]arlours often make you feel like you're obliged to go through with the clients'.[43]

For those who continued to work in parlours, decriminalisation – when it came – did not immediately ease concerns about parlour managers' demands of workers. In September 2005, a TV One exposé featured extracts from a memo a 'well-known' Wellington parlour circulated among staff. The memo asserted that all outcalls were mandatory and would remain so until 'one of our girls has a scary or threatening experience on an outcall booked by us'.[44]

Together, the oral histories reveal the value narrators placed on finding mentors in the industry and becoming part of a community, sometimes for the first time. Gaining the acceptance of a seasoned worker was essential for newcomers to be able to work in areas they felt would be otherwise off-limits. Several narrators attributed their survival in the industry to the generosity of people who embraced them, introduced them to other workers, and taught them how to manage clients. The oral histories highlighted not only the unity of the community – which is perhaps tempting to prioritise against a backdrop of prejudice from the wider public – but also the intimidation and violence that existed within these groups. In doing so, they offered a rich and nuanced depiction of the social networks that developed to provide emotional support and physical protection while competing for business in a criminalised industry. The law reinforced a power hierarchy that made workers vulnerable to their employers, the general public, and clients. It was the unity among workers that helped them to disturb this power imbalance. As the following chapter reveals, the importance of community and mentorship did not end there. Information and advice from others in the industry was vital to helping people, especially those new to the work, to recognise and assert their rights over their bodies.

CHAPTER FOUR

Body Autonomy

In April 1994, the editors of *Siren* featured 'The Sensitive New Age Clients Guide'. The two-page piece aligned with the NZPC's contractual obligation with the Department of Health to develop and disseminate information on HIV and AIDS to the sex worker population. It advised clients to educate themselves on dental dams and water-based lubricant and warned readers, 'Don't even think of asking for it without condoms. No condom, no fuck! Her life is beyond price, even if yours isn't.' But the feature did more. It reminded readers to recognise and respect sex workers' rights over their bodies. The authors warned readers that many workers found kissing too personal, and to ask 'right at the beginning if you want something "special" that not every girl does'. Importantly, they emphasised that '[s]he has agreed to intimate behaviour with you but she has the right to set limits. She's selling a service, not herself.'[1]

Public misconceptions that sex workers had forgone the right to say no by simply being involved in the sex industry had very real impacts on their comfort and safety. The article's place in a community magazine that was written by and for sex workers suggests that although it was addressed to the clients who read and occasionally contributed to *Siren*, sex workers who might not have been aware of these rights were also an intended audience. International scholars have pointed out that an emphasis on sexual experimentation with the sexual revolution, coupled with the rise of massage parlours and access to explicit pornography from the 1970s, created a market that sought 'greater versatility' from sex workers.[2] They also attributed this shift to the change in clientele. The increasing availability of contraception

and changing sexual mores meant clients were no longer primarily young men seeking extramarital sex, but rather older married men pursuing sexual experiences unavailable at home.[3] Further, competition for business made it difficult to refuse clients' requests for 'more specialised services'.[4] Yet less is known about how the behaviour individual sex workers in New Zealand considered acceptable changed over time, and the extent to which they could enforce these limits with clients.

Each of the narrators in this book started sex work from the 1970s and 1980s. By this time, women's liberationists had made significant headway in exposing the prevalence of sexual violence in Aotearoa and rejecting victim-blaming rape myths. They publicly demanded women's safety during Reclaim the Night marches and established rape crisis centres across the country.[5] Yet such exposure did not always translate to a wider recognition of individuals' body autonomy. Public ideas that a woman was available for sex simply because of her choice of clothing or her married status (before spousal immunity for rape was repealed in 1985), among other arbitrary markers, prevailed. This chapter teases out these issues. It highlights how participants, many of whom started sex work with little prior sex education, learned about sexual practices and pleasure while already in the industry. It then moves on to examine how narrators rejected or internalised ideas that they had indeed sold their bodies by undertaking sex work. Consent is an important focus of this chapter. The final section explores how narrators revisited and articulated their experiences of defending their rights over their body amidst evolving public conversations about what consent entails.

Enforcing boundaries

Annah was one of the few people I interviewed who described learning about body autonomy at home. Annah was born in Onehunga, Auckland, in 1974 as the third of her parents' four children. Her parents were dedicated members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and had immigrated to New Zealand from Fiji the previous decade. She remembered them as being relatively open-minded about sex, especially compared with other Christian Pacific parents of that era. Her father was particularly 'good around the reproductive part of a woman's body', and 'always went out and got my mum, my sister, and myself our sanitary pads and spoke about our monthly cycles. I mean, he doesn't even have a uterus!'

Annah's parents made a point of educating her and her siblings on 'our rights, and our bodies, and to make a conscious decision about what you decide to do'. She remembered:

> One thing my parents have always said was that our body is the image of God. We must respect everything we eat and drink, do it to glorify God. But the other side is that when you make a decision, make sure you do it safely, that you protect yourself, and are conscious about what happens if things happen that are out of your control.

Annah's awareness of her rights over her body, and her gratitude toward her parents, who 'have always taught me to speak out', were key themes across her interview. Annah's first exposure to the sex industry came during high school. She had been an academically competitive student and 'a teacher's pet' before 'the hormones kicked in and I just lost interest in school'. She was drawn to some of her peers who 'were drinking, they were having sex, some of them were doing sex work around the corner from school. And they were transgender. And they were the cool kids, and I was quite intrigued.' The students congregated at a cemetery in Onehunga on Friday nights with other teenagers from Ōtara and Mount Roskill. Annah was eager to join them. The gathering coincided with the seventh-day Sabbath, the period of rest from Friday evenings to Saturday evenings, that her family practised as part of their faith. As expected, her parents forbade her from leaving the house that evening. The then fourteen-year-old 'grabbed my underwear and my bras and I ran away'.

Annah spent the next six months squatting in deserted buildings around Karangahape Road and Queen Street with several other teenagers who had either run away from home or had been state wards. She remembered 'gravitat[ing] to the streets because I wanted to be a gangster' and spent time with other Pacific teenagers who were starting street gangs, including the South Auckland-based Tongan Crip Gang, having been inspired by music from Public Enemy and N.W.A. about resisting power and fighting oppression. Such 'LA-style street gangs' became prominent among some young people in New Zealand in the 1990s and 2000s. As Jarrod Gilbert argues, they were 'a reflection of a modern vogue coming out of America, based on hip-hop and rap music'.[6] Yet Annah's plans to join a gang did not eventuate. She explained, 'I'm a geek really, I'm a geek at heart. I'm a good

girl. Even though I really wanted to join them and be there, I'm still odd.' The disconnect between Annah's disposition and her desire to join a gang was most clear in her first run-in with the law: 'I'm a hopeless criminal. I did actually try to steal to join a gang and I got caught the first time. And don't laugh, it was stealing dog food and socks.' She ended up being sentenced to community service, which involved cleaning the toilets at her high school under her mother's supervision.

Annah soon became aware of the vulnerable position she and other young people on the street faced. She recounted one occasion when she stayed at her social worker's home, and he started watching pornography. It was 'not uncommon' for children to stay at social workers' houses, although, she clarified, 'this is unrecorded, of course, and they were obviously breaching the code of ethics'. While her social worker 'didn't come after me or anything, I knew, my instincts were that sexualised behaviour could be very exploitative'. Annah barricaded herself in her bedroom and felt fortunate that 'I know the difference between coercion and exploitation even at that age around consent, but I know some other kids don't'.

It was during her time on the street that Annah became aware of the sex industry. She remembered sitting opposite Myers Park with a friend one evening and watching the street-based workers interact with their clients:

> We were hungry. We were only teenagers, we were hungry. And we were sitting there watching the street workers work and get in and out of the cars. . . . And there was a worker who saw us, and she said to me, 'What are you kids doing out here?' And we were like, 'We're just watching what you're doing. How do you do that?' She said, 'You're not fucking coming on the streets, do you hear me?' She goes, 'What the fuck are you doing out here?' And we said, 'We're hungry, we ran away from home.' So, she gave us some money to feed us, she said, 'Don't you ever think about doing what we're doing here, this isn't for kids.' And then she looked at the girl that was next to me, she said, 'She will make money,' but I had very short hair then because my idol at the time was Grace Jones, so I had a Grace Jones crewcut. But she looked at me and she said, 'You look like a boy, you won't make money.'

Annah did not revisit the idea of sex work until several years later. By that time, she had reconciled with her parents, had spent time working as a travel consultant and then a nanny in Sydney, and had returned to Auckland in 1991 when her dad was diagnosed with terminal cancer. She gained a job at a lingerie factory in Onehunga and feared she 'was going to be stuck in that factory and die there'.

While Annah had been raised to recognise her body autonomy, she remembered being much more naïve about sex before she joined her first parlour at the age of twenty-two in 1996. She was not alone. Most of the narrators in this book grew up in what sexual health pioneer Dame Margaret Sparrow characterised in 1987 as a 'fairly sex negative society' that kept people uninformed and confused about sex and sexual health.[7] From the 1970s, feminists in New Zealand and elsewhere brought attention to how such repressive attitudes towards sex disadvantaged women.[8] The Boston Women's Health Book Collective's seminal text *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (1970) is a particularly notable example of feminists' push for more open discussions about sex. Authors shared their sexual fantasies, same-sex desires and experiences with masturbation, among other topics.[9] In New Zealand during the early 1980s, the Family Planning Association advocated for sex education in schools. Nevertheless, any discussion about sex and sexual relationships in schools remained limited.[10]

Some interviewees described teachers giving covert classes on sex education. Cherida remembered that her Year 12 biology teacher invited staff from the Family Planning Association to deliver a lesson, 'but we were sworn to secrecy. He told us if we told our parents he'd lose his job, probably. And I didn't tell anybody about that class for years.' For many, this silence was echoed in the home. Gina, who features later in this book, remembered, 'When I was sixteen or seventeen, I think my mother came to me with some books to read about sex. By then it was too late, I already knew everything. They were quite closed about it, Mum never really talked to me about it, so I found out through my peers.'

Annah started sex work by approaching an old friend from school, who introduced her to a parlour that specialised in fetish and BDSM and aptly advised her: 'You're going to learn fast.' Annah certainly had a lot of learning to do. She explained, 'When I looked at my own personal experience around sex, I'd only ever slept with four guys. So, what I perceived in my personal sex life was completely different to what unravels in the sex industry.' Her prior sexual experiences included having sex for the first time

at the age of fourteen: 'He was a Catholic and I think when he realised I was a virgin – bless his cotton socks – he took me to the Alice Bush centre, which was the original Family Planning on Mercury Lane.'

While Annah had learned about her rights and setting boundaries prior to starting sex work, others learned to do so after they had entered the industry. Alex had significant exposure to sex and coercion well before she started sex work at the age of fourteen in 1985. She had spent the first ten years of her life living in various foster homes and had attended six or seven different primary schools across Auckland. She explained that while several people applied to adopt her, including one of the doctors from Auckland Hospital, where she was born, her teenage birth parents vetoed each adoption application. It meant, 'I did live in a lot of homes unnecessarily, I think.' The Adoption Act 1955 required the consent of the birth parents, or at least the birth mother, before an adoption could be approved. Yet the input Alex's birth parents had, especially as a young, unmarried Māori couple, into her adoption is uncertain. Alex was born during what scholars identify as the era of closed stranger adoption, whereby individuals were adopted into families with no connection to their birth families, and any contact between the child and their birth parents was severed.[11] Historian Maria Haenga-Collins argues that this practice, which disproportionately affected Māori children who were placed with Pākehā families, 'result[ed] in ruinous long-term, intergenerational consequences on Māori family values, kinship ties, and social organisation'.[12] Many adoptees were unable to identify their Māori parent or parents and they 'grieve their unknown whakapapa and feel "inauthentic" and invisible as Māori as a result'.[13]

The cultural disconnect Haenga-Collins describes emerged in Alex's testimony. Shortly before her eleventh birthday, she met a social worker who became her final foster mother. She moved in with the family, which included three elder brothers, on the North Shore. Alex described her foster mother as very intelligent and kind, and keen for her to gain the insight into te ao Māori that she could not offer as a Pākehā woman. Alex explained:

> I was living in this really liberal European family on the Shore, and they thought it would be wonderful if I gained some cultural balance in my life. One of the things they thought was – not *wrong* with me – but missing, was that connection. There were times people were racist to me, but I didn't think it was about racism, I'd think it was about being so different. Just

> brown, whatever, and a lot of people thought I was Chinese. So, they thought I should gain something about myself. But before that, I had a social worker whose job it was to help me understand that I was actually brown [laughs]. Lovely lady. I don't think she helped me gain anything in that way except she herself was a Māori person [laughs] . . . I don't know what she actually did, but she would tell me that being brown is not a terrible thing, that being Māori can be really wonderful. I guess because a lot of times in care, being told you're a bad child or you won't amount to anything, and I don't know if that's about being brown or if that's about being an unwanted person generally. Not unwanted, but sometimes if things would go wrong, it would automatically be my fault. But a lot of the things I was blamed for I hadn't done, so you are constantly defending your existence.

Alex's foster mother subsequently enrolled her in Queen Victoria School in Parnell, an Anglican boarding school for Māori girls. She described experiencing culture shock: 'I found it very tough going to a Māori boarding school, I didn't actually know any Māori people at all, so that was really quite wacky.' She earned the nickname 'toast' for being 'brown on the outside and white inside'. Alex ran away from boarding school several times. She spent her nights wandering K Road while she waited for the morning bus to take her home to Milford.

Seeing the workers on K Road exposed Alex to 'sex for sale rather than sex . . . as a bargaining tool. And freely given I think is the thing, rather than under pressure.' It was an entirely different perspective on sex than that which she had previously encountered. Alex remembered one particularly abusive foster home she was placed in at the age of nine. The home was 'more like a transit station' with ten to twenty children at a time, where 'there was a lot of sexuality. Like, sex was a commodity. At times it was just a punishment and sometimes it was just a threat.' While it was 'common knowledge' that both foster parents abused the children in their care, they managed to evade being investigated by relocating to a different town each time a child or social worker complained to the authorities. Alex testified against her main abuser in court ten years prior to the interview, but he once again managed to avoid conviction by fleeing the country. Conversely, she described being taken aback by the transparency around sex on K Road:

> I never felt threatened and there was a lot of kindness. I suppose a lot of things could have happened, but they were just nice people. I never felt threatened or anything. There were guys that would try to pick you up, but it was in an open way that they would try to pick up anyone. And so, it would be quite silly stuff. But I never felt in bad situations.

Alex started sex work when a friend's brother introduced her to other teenage parlour workers in Newton Gully near K Road. She earned $700 on her first evening and hid the cash from her parents, who thought she had spent the night at her friend's house.

Alex was still two years under the age of legally being able to consent to sex, and there was certainly a power imbalance between the young teenager and her adult clients. Yet her nonchalance about her first shift, which she remembered as one where 'I got paid and it was fine', perhaps reflects the juxtaposition between the abusive foster home she remembered and the autonomy she felt in the parlour. In response to my question about whether she had previously considered sex work, Alex promptly replied 'Nope!' Nevertheless, 'I thought, How easy was that? Without all the pressure. I thought, I don't know, why is that bad?' Alex subsequently gained a job at a rap parlour that advertised 'no age restriction', where clients paid a set fee to talk to the women and then negotiated extras with them. Business owners established rap parlours to bypass the Massage Parlours Act 1978 and avoid having to gain a licence and maintain a register for their staff. Yet these establishments operated in very similar ways.

Like many others in this book, Alex remembered the mid-1980s as a time when the clients 'were generous guys, and grateful, and really civil'. She had transferred to Auckland Girls' Grammar School by that point, which was a short walk to K Road. She described her first years in the industry as ones where:

> I was young, and I thought the whole thing was a bit hilarious. So, I had a bit of fun. But there were a lot of drugs and that, and people would say, oh you know, 'Take these pills.' But I still had school, I still went home every night, so I had to balance that. So, I never took drugs because I knew my parents would have been disappointed [laughs]. So, one side was really a bit conservative, and I went to Sunday school and

> that with my parents and I was in Girls' Brigade and things. And then I went to school in the city, and then sometimes at lunchtime or after school before I went home, I would go and make some money.

Most of Alex's colleagues were Thai women, and she remembered them as 'very loving, loving people, and inclusive. So, they were very caring. They were a small group that really stuck together.' She also described support from management. She explained, 'Nobody got fired. And if you got in a poo or something like that, or you were tired, or upset, or some guy was rude to you – which was super rare – you just went home.' Alex's later experiences of exploitation in the industry perhaps shaped her nostalgia for the earlier years. She moved to a massage parlour in downtown Auckland when she turned eighteen in 1988. She identified clear differences between the working-class clientele she encountered on K Road and the white-collar clients who frequented the later establishments:

> In a lot of other places, like at Flora's or Penthouse, guys could be pretty demanding, and they'd complain to management, and you'd have to give the money back. And you could be fined for being late or talking back to one of your clients, or if you pissed the management off, they just wouldn't give you any work that night. If you actually were tired, like if you'd been really busy and you were tired and they asked you to stay until freaking midday the next day, if you said 'no' then maybe you couldn't have a shift next week. So that type of thing was different.

The perils of inexperience

The sex industry's transparency around sex was a welcome change from the silence many had experienced beforehand. It is also notable that individuals' memories of sexual naïvete before entering the industry, and their uncertainty about asserting their boundaries, featured almost exclusively in interviews with cisgender women narrators. This discrepancy might reflect both their gendered experiences and the attention women's body autonomy has attracted in recent years, meaning these narrators had

the framework in which to articulate these challenges. Feminist writers brought attention to the impact the lack of direct conversations about sex could have on women's safety. Writing in the context of HIV and AIDS in 1989, one author in the feminist magazine *Broadsheet* argued: 'Women are encouraged from childhood to be socially passive. As they grow older this extends to their sexuality.' Consequently, 'in a society in which we are not all equal, we do not have an equal ability to protect ourselves'.[14] The following year, in 1990, the National Council on AIDS reported that the power imbalance between women and men, combined with cultural norms that inhibited frank discussions about sex, made it difficult for women to protect themselves by insisting on condom use.[15] As Chapter Six outlines, these were only some of the factors that made it difficult for individuals to insist on the use of condoms. The lack of discussion about sex had wide-reaching consequences that meant women in particular were not taught to recognise their body autonomy, and others were not taught to respect it.

Some workers internalised ideas that they had indeed 'sold' their body by entering the sex industry, and remembered struggling to enforce boundaries over what sexual behaviour they felt was acceptable. People who were new to the industry were especially vulnerable to clients' demands. Gina was born in 1969 and grew up in West Auckland. She described herself as a good student and achieved School Certificate and University Entrance before she left school and gained a job in a pharmacy at the age of seventeen. She particularly enjoyed English, economics and biology, but socially 'I had very low self-esteem; I was a slow developer, so I felt like a little girl around everybody'. Her teenage years involved 'getting wasted on drugs, going to parties, getting into all sorts of mischief, being sexually promiscuous, the usual stuff'. Discovering she was pregnant at the age of twenty-one was 'the straw that broke the camel's back' and she decided to enter a rehabilitation facility for drug and alcohol dependence.

Gina gained a job as a receptionist in a South Auckland massage parlour when her son was three or four years old. She remembered 'all these girls making all this money, and I was just sitting on reception making stuff-all'. The money was enticing, and Gina made her first foray into sex work shortly afterwards, when she accepted a parlour client's request for a private booking at his house. She found the work 'easy. It was really, really easy. It was at his house, he was a really nice older guy, and he treated me really well.' That evening marked the start of her decade-long career in massage parlours and later as a dominatrix in the Waikato and the Bay of Plenty.

The ease of sex work was a dominant theme in Gina's testimony. Shortly after the private booking, she left the parlour and gained a job alongside a friend's sister at a parlour in central Auckland. She remembered the experience as 'easy! It was just easy. I was young and had a gorgeous figure, and it was easy! Yeah, it was just easy money.' Gina's emphasis on the lucrativeness of sex work overshadowed her memories of discomfort with the job itself:

> I wasn't that comfortable with myself, I suppose. The sexual partners I'd had, I guess we'd been out of it, drunk sessions, and there was no real intimacy there. So yeah, it was quite difficult at first, just getting used to it all.

Gina's reference to her discomfort foreshadowed a deeper discussion about the challenges of starting in the industry without support from management or from her colleagues. In response to the interviewer's question about the guidance she received before her first shift, she promptly replied:

> Nothing. Absolutely nothing. I didn't even know to use lube or anything like that. Yeah, it was really awkward. . . . It was understood you use condoms. But these days the girls take the new ones under their wing and tell them what to do and perhaps do a bit of training, but we never had that. The girls were all really secretive and [mimics whispering] didn't wanna pass on what they did in the room, sort of thing. So, yeah. I found it quite intimidating and quite difficult until I sort of learned a bit more.

Several factors contributed to secrecy among parlour employees. Gina started working in the early 1990s. While she emphasised the easy money, many others identified the 1990s as a particularly hard period to survive in the industry. The introduction of shift fees and fines, coupled with the decline of clients due to the 'long Rogernomics recession' from 1986 to 1993 and the HIV and AIDS epidemic, fuelled competition among workers for business.[16] As employers, parlour managers had a duty of care to provide safe working conditions. Yet they also raised concerns about being charged with brothel-keeping if they shared any information that suggested they knew sex occurred on the premises.

These factors did not deter all parlour workers and managers from offering guidance to others. Several other narrators remembered developing strong friendships with their colleagues in parlours, and some managers directed new workers to the NZPC, Family Planning and sexual health clinics.[17] The secrecy Gina experienced prevented her from being able to set boundaries with her clients:

> You'd try to discourage them from putting fingers inside you because they were really rough, and fingernails and hands are really dirty. But when I first started working, I didn't know this, and I used to let them do anything. I mean this is for the first probably few months, I'd let them put their fingers inside me, and I just didn't know that you didn't have to. And once I learned that, it never happened. Mmm. But initially I wasn't aware, which is really, really sad.

Conversations about enforcing boundaries with clients were certainly occurring in the industry. Writing in the July 1990 edition of *Siren,* one author cautioned readers: 'Clients will often try and get away with whatever *you* let them,' and advised them to '[m]ake them realise this is *your* territory and *you* are in control'.[18] The author encouraged readers to collect money at the beginning of the session in order to be able to stop 'at any point you wish if the client gets rough or difficult' and to 'remember you don't have to do anything you don't want to'.[19] Sex workers also asserted that the exact behaviour Gina described was unacceptable. In 'The Sensitive New Age Clients Guide', which opened this chapter, the editors of *Siren* emphasised: 'Fingers outside are often OK but not always. Fingers inside often are not. When did you last file and clean your fingernails anyway?'[20]

Gina described developing confidence and being able to set the terms of these encounters as she gained more experience in the industry:

> They could be quite rough, so you had to distract them to do something else to stop them from being so rough. As I got more experienced it got easier and I was more comfortable with saying, 'These are my limits,' 'I'm warning you,' 'You're going too far.' As I got more experienced and older it was a lot easier. But initially it was quite intimidating, and you didn't always know what was allowed and what wasn't. I think back

> and that was horrible to be in that position, you'd never let a girl go through that these days, if you can help it. And when I started receptioning and managing places I always . . . or even before that, when I was in the last stages of my career, if I had a regular client, I'd get a lady to come in and watch me so that she could see how I worked in the room, so she would know what to do. Or I'd go in with her initially just to get her started and let her know. Which was really cool. I was really open, and I didn't want them to go through what I had gone through. So hopefully that helped somebody. I'm sure it did.

The knowledge of what rules existed, and the ability to enforce these rules, depended on the degree of openness within a particular parlour. Gina's reflection that she didn't always know 'what was allowed', rather than what *she* allowed, signals the extent to which she viewed herself as subject to the norms of the wider industry.

Shifting expectations

Yet there was also the pressure to perform sexual services that aligned with what others offered, especially when workers' livelihoods relied on attracting clients and building a clientele. Australian historian Raelene Frances traced the shift away from the 'intense solidarity' among street-based workers in East Sydney in the 1960s, which 'ensured that few women offered anything except "straight" coitus', to the increasing demand for more 'diverse services, especially oral sex' in the 1970s.[21] Consequently, while one woman was allegedly beaten by her peers for providing oral sex in the early 1960s, it had become a common occurrence in Australian brothels by the end of the following decade.[22]

The changing expectations of what services workers should provide was a point of contention in the industry. The pages of *Siren* reflect the tensions between workers who willingly expanded their services, and those who felt forced to follow suit to avoid losing business. In April 1995, one writer expressed their 'horror' at women who breached the 'golden rules' of sex work by kissing clients and letting clients perform oral sex on them. They argued that their fee covered oral sex on the client and intercourse – 'that's all. I'm not his lover!!!' – and urged others to 'be professional' and maintain the standard.[23] Breaching such rules also posed a risk to workers'

and clients' health. The NZPC warned readers that viruses and bacteria could be transmitted through kissing and unprotected oral sex.[24]

The introduction of all-inclusive prices, where clients paid a set fee that included sexual services, rather than negotiating with workers for particular services, was another example of parlour managers undermining their employees' autonomy to determine which behaviours they felt were acceptable. All-inclusive prices had emerged in the late 1980s with the rise in credit card payments.[25] They gained traction the following decade, with Catherine Healy describing the system as a double-edged sword. While all-inclusive fees protected workers from having to negotiate prices in the room with clients who could be difficult and unrelenting, it also placed pressure on workers to have sex as they had been 'pre-sold'. The rise of all-inclusive prices exacerbated the power imbalance in the parlours, where managers could dismiss masseuses without notice. Some parlour workers reported succumbing to managers' requirements to kiss clients and to forgo the use of condoms in order to keep their jobs.[26] Consequently, as the *Weekend Review* reported in 1999: 'The freedom to say no has been utterly undermined.'[27]

Debates about the range of sexual services that individuals would offer continued into the new millennium. In July 2000, *Siren* published a four-page guide on anal sex in response to the numerous enquiries the NZPC had received from workers. The authors reported that, considering 'the increasing appearance of "anal" as standard fare in general porn . . . it is not surprising that clients are turning up wanting the same'.[28] While they argued that 'it should always remain a worker's prerogative what sexual favours she will make available to the marketplace', they also provided advice for those who were 'curious about adding it as a speciality to your working repertoire'.[29] The article was evidence of the increasing occurrence of anal sex.[30] In December that year, a 'long-time working girl' interviewed for *Metro* noted, 'Ten years ago people used to ask if you did oral sex; now they want to know if you'll do anal.' She attributed the shift towards 'more invasive acts' to the increase in competition caused by more people joining the industry.[31]

Revisiting consent in sex work

Most of the interviews for this book took place from 2019 to 2021. In the preceding years, discussions about consent and sexual violence reached centre stage with the international '#MeToo' and 'Time's Up' campaigns. These movements not only provoked more open discussions about the sheer

prevalence of sexual violence, but also triggered critical reflections on what constitutes consent and, importantly, what does not.

Consent was an important part of Frankie's testimony. Frankie grew up in a small town in the central North Island, which she described as 'steeped in this quiet racism, homophobia and sexism'. When asked whether she had heard any discussions about consent growing up, she explained: 'I remember hearing about cock-teases and leading boys on, and we all know they don't need a lot of leading on.' While Frankie experimented sexually with other girls at primary school, she remembered having had little awareness of sex education or sexuality. At the age of sixteen, she met another teenager who identified as bisexual. It was 'a real moment of awakening for me in terms of sexuality' when she realised 'you didn't have to be gay or straight, you could be both and that was okay'.

Frankie's introduction to sex work came in 1996, when she rented a spare room in her flat to a woman who was open about being a street-based worker, and the woman's boyfriend. She described her flatmate as 'really lovely, and so that certainly defied anything I might have thought'. As she explained, however:

> I didn't know at the time, but [the boyfriend] began grooming me to enter the industry. I was clearly a vulnerable teenager, and I'd always been open-minded and so I was really curious as to what this world was. So, it was really through them that I started to learn about the industry. So, I don't know how to explain it, and in fact I've *never* told anyone that this is how it started – I give a different version when people ask me how I came into the industry. But he put a bit of pressure on me that he needed someone else to work for him, but it wasn't on the street, it was in this bar and he kind of convinced my friend and I to do it. And we were young and clearly underage. And we did. And so, I had this experience of being paid for sex for the first time and I felt really . . . not okay about it.

Frankie remembered the experience as a 'pretty seedy introduction into the industry' which 'probably affected me for years'.

Frankie did not return to sex work until seven years later, in late 2003. In the interim, she had close proximity to massage parlours through starting work as a dancer at a major adult entertainment club in downtown

Auckland at the age of eighteen in 1997. The job enabled her to achieve the 'autonomy and independence that I wouldn't have been able to have any other way'. She earned enough money to support herself and her seven-month-old daughter, hired an overnight babysitter, and returned home at 3 a.m. 'with these really engorged breasts ready to feed her again'. The financial freedom Frankie achieved was tempered by the treatment she endured from strip club patrons:

> I was struggling with dancing. Sometimes you just had enough. You know, when you put yourself on a stage you're there, and you're subjected to criticism, and it can be really hard on someone who's really young. And especially then being naked was considered implicit [sighs] – how do I say this? You may not be giving consent, and we definitely weren't giving consent, but the men consider it implicit consent because you're naked. So, in reality, you're dealing with sexual assault every night. And I found that really hard after a period of time that these men, no matter how many times I said, 'You can't touch me, you can't touch my vagina', that these men would do that. And it's quite shocking. And yes, you could get them kicked out of the club but they always got a warning first so they essentially had an opportunity to grab your pussy before anything would happen. And these guys would do that, and they considered it okay. The worst were the groups, because you get men around naked women, and the testosterone. I had breast implants when I was nineteen, and that really upped the ante in terms of harassment because once you have them, men and women – because they're not, in quotation marks, 'real' – they would just grab them. But you just had men grab you by the breasts, or you'd walk past, and they'd slide a hand between your thighs, or I know very few dancers who haven't had someone all of a sudden try to stick his fingers inside you wherever they can get to. I think a lot of this for me, and whether you include this or not is up to you, but I developed an eating disorder. So, I ended up with anorexia. And I still experienced it. And in my head, it'll be like, Do you not see how frail I am? It was kind of like I was breaking, and I was mirroring this on the outside, and

> it used to still happen. I found that to be a really tough time. And that was when I was in my twenties. Yeah. And if you asked them, they'd be like, 'No I didn't sexually assault her!' But it's still what was happening.

Through her testimony, Frankie reclaimed agency over her body and rejected suggestions that working in the adult entertainment industry equated implied consent. She revisited the discussion about boundaries when she described starting work at Famous Flora's, a massage parlour in central Auckland. She explained:

> I can vaguely remember my first day and being like, Oh God, what do I do? I remember the guy asking me to give him oral sex and I said, 'No I don't do that' [laughs]. Like I didn't even know that I had to. I was just so naïve [laughs]. I knew I had to have sex, but I was just a bit clueless, I think. And then everything I learned, I learned from other women who were working there. Like the ones who said, 'Check for the condom because some of them will take it off.' Just like the little bits and pieces to try and help protect you because you're really not taught. So, you'd give them a massage, and then you know at some point you'd have sex. For me, there was something freeing about the fact that I was no longer fighting over consent. Like, I'd agreed to have sex with this person. I probably didn't understand certain things, like that I could say no. I knew that legally we could say no, we didn't want to see someone, but that's really frowned upon when you're working in a brothel. So, you did. There were people I wouldn't see, but it was usually because I'd had an experience with them that was concerning, and so then I wouldn't.

Frankie's narrative speaks to the limitations of consent that prevailed in some massage parlours even after most aspects of sex work were decriminalised in June 2003. The lack of advice from management, and the unspoken policy against declining clients, sheds light on the external pressures that stopped workers from being able to gain full control over the behaviours they were willing to accept. These pressures are, of course, in addition to the financial barriers that meant few could afford to turn

down business. (The significance of clients covertly removing the condom is further discussed shortly.)

Frankie's final assessment of the privilege of working with her peers can be read as a resistance against stereotypes that belittle those in the industry. At the end of the interview, she concluded:

> I guess I should only speak for me; the negative is a fraction of what I experienced. I have so many really great experiences. In fact, for me usually a booking that's not that good is just because it was a bit tedious, or we didn't really click so it was a bit harder work. Yeah, none of the really tough stuff. I'm pretty lucky. But what I've found, in the time that I've been in the industry, is that I've met just so many amazing people, like great morals, great values, highly educated, ones that aren't highly educated are often still very intelligent. You know, maybe haven't had the opportunities. We've all gone into the industry for different reasons. But we're all in it together, and it's just been in so many ways such an honour.

It is telling that the qualities Frankie listed – morals, values and intelligence – directly contrast with negative depictions of sex workers that have prevailed since the nineteenth century. Such stereotypes have resulted in sex workers being seen as less deserving of safety and protection than those outside of the sex industry. Frankie's emphasis on the character of her former colleagues is perhaps a way to contest these attitudes and to highlight the severity of the violence they endured at work. She described the inquisitiveness of others, who insisted, 'You must get some really bad things that happen to you, what's the worst thing that's happened?' While she excused such questions – 'We're like that, people are like that, we like to know stuff' – her account also indicated a sense of frustration that people would enquire about potentially emotionally devastating encounters to satisfy their intrigue or, perhaps, their prurient interest. As Frankie concluded, 'I used to find [those questions] brutal [laughs]'.

Consent also emerged as a key theme in Kate's testimony. Kate grew up in a small town in the lower North Island and moved to Wellington to attend university at the age of sixteen in 1980. After living in university accommodation for a year, Kate moved into a flat on The Terrace and became involved in anti-apartheid activism. It was 'the year of the tour, so there

was a ton of stuff going on. I don't know how I did any study as well, really.' The Springbok tour took place over eight weeks when, as historians Jenny Carlyon and Diana Morrow argue, the country 'was embroiled in a state of angry conflict' that had been mounting for over half a century.[32] Kate took part in a couple of marches each week, organised events, and attended meetings of Citizens Opposed to the Springbok Tour. Life was 'exciting and heady'. The final chapter explores Kate's involvement in feminist activism and her entry to sex work in further depth.

Kate became familiar with sex work through friends who worked in local massage parlours, but 'I had never thought I would be tough enough or cool enough to do it, to be honest'. Nevertheless, after leaving her university course and spending several years travelling overseas, Kate was running low on money and joined an escort agency in December 1988. She moved into parlour work after three or four months and simultaneously resumed her university studies. Kate left sex work in late 1989 following a booking with an older client who 'wasn't very nice'. She explained, 'And I was just like "Oh, fuck this!" [laughs]. And after the job with him I just got my stuff and went home, and I never went back.' My follow-up question about the client's behaviour became a segue into Kate's in-depth reflections on consent in sex work:

> There are guys that stick in my mind as being not nice. Like, I remember somebody taking a condom off during a job, which is really uncool. Somebody just got convicted of rape for doing that recently in New Zealand, which is kind of awesome. I would never have even thought of it like that myself at the time. Obviously, I didn't think it was a good thing. I knew it was a terrible thing for someone to have done. But shit, I wouldn't have thought of it as rape. So that's kind of awesome.
>
> *It is. And it's also changing more public ideas, I guess, of what rape is.*
>
> And what consent is and everything, eh? What are you consenting to or not consenting to? It's not consent to all things. It's not consent to all things. Yeah, it's interesting to think about consent, isn't it, with sex work? I feel like I need to think on it more and unpick it more. You'd think I'd have done that enough already by now, huh? But I haven't

> been thinking about sex work that much in the last couple of years, I suppose. But people used to – not people in the sex industry – but people used to say stuff like, 'Oh, a sex worker can't be raped, a prostitute can't be raped.' As though if you have consented to sex work you have consented to all sex, blanket kind of sex. And then the polar opposite of that to me is the thing that the abolitionist people would say, where they're saying that you can't consent to being a sex worker. That all sex work, *that all sex work*, is rape. I feel like I need to draw a picture or something to look at how these ideas work. They're so black and white and they're like the opposites of each other. One is that: if you're a sex worker you have consented to all sex, forever, from everybody, you can't ever say no again. But the other people are also saying basically – what are they saying? That you can't consent, that it's not possible to consent, that sex workers that think that they're consenting are deluded, and that it's all rape. So, it's really problematic. You have to be able to have those dividing lines. Like, if someone wants to choose to work in a massage parlour for whatever reason, there's a real difference, a huge difference, between consensual paid sex and being raped or something. So, that's very problematic thinking.

Covertly removing a condom during sex is now recognised as an assault known as stealthing. Stealthing made national headlines in April 2021 when a man was sentenced to three years and nine months in prison for raping a woman employed in a Wellington brothel by removing the condom without her knowledge. New Zealand media outlets celebrated the conviction as the first of its kind. They suggested the 'landmark case' could lead to a change in legislation that would explicitly outlaw the covert removal of a condom during sexual encounters.[33] Kate's acknowledgement that she would not have considered the act rape in the late 1980s does not downplay the severity of the assault. Rather, her explicit reference to the conviction highlights how it gave her the ability she perhaps once lacked to recognise the assault as rape.

That Kate knew the condom removal was a 'terrible thing to do' perhaps reflects not only the perpetrator's violation of her boundaries, but also his blatant disregard for the risk he posed to her health. The assault

took place during the height of the HIV and AIDS epidemic in Aotearoa, when sex worker activists were especially vocal about the importance of condoms, and this violation of Kate's autonomy had potentially life-threatening implications.[34] Yet it was not considered rape. It highlights the kinds of behaviour women were expected to endure, especially when they worked in the sex industry.[35]

In 1996, an independent escort in Christchurch took a male client to the Disputes Tribunal for his refusal to either wear a condom, or produce a health certificate and pay the $1000 fee she charged for unprotected sex. The *Sunday Star-Times*' headline, 'Prostitute Sues Client for Breach of Promise', reflected the lack of understanding of the significance of the assault.[36] Not only had the client refused to wear a condom, but he also 'overpowered her with "intimidation, violent threats and superior strength"'.[37] While the rapist's use of physical force alone fell within the definition of rape, the woman decided to seek damages for her unpaid fee rather than pursue a rape complaint as 'I didn't want to be tried on my morals'.[38] Other discussions about stealthing appear to have already been underway overseas. Three years earlier, in 1993, *Siren* reported that sex workers in the Australian Capital Territory could make a citizen's arrest if a client refused to use a condom or removed one.[39] Yet their ability to do so was based on laws that mandated the use of condoms in commercial sexual encounters, rather than an awareness that refusal to use a condom breached their consent.[40]

Some sex workers overseas had been particularly vocal that men who refused to wear a condom or removed one had committed rape decades before such cases reached the mainstream press. The April 1998 edition of *Siren* featured an article about a 'first of its kind' case where a man was imprisoned for raping five sex workers in the UK, all of whom had withdrawn their consent when he refused to wear a condom. Anne Rafferty QC stated her lack of surprise that 'the issue has now crystallised as to whether, if a man refuses to wear a condom, that constitutes lack of consent. I'm only surprised it's taken this long.'[41] Despite her comments, the court case focused on the perpetrator's use of force once the women had withdrawn consent, rather than his refusal to wear a condom. He also received a 'relatively lenient sentence' of four years because the crimes had taken place between 1984 and 1990, at least six years before the trial. The defence lawyer's comment that 'his wife had discovered his activities and now always accompanied him on his travel' also concerned women's groups, who argued 'this man is not considered a danger to the public only because he is accompanied

by a woman, who is acting as his gatekeeper'.[42] Additionally, in April 2000, *NZ Truth* published an article titled 'Five Years for Having Sex without Condom'. While the headline suggested the perpetrator's refusal to wear a condom when 'having sex' was the criminal offence, the article itself treated his lack of condom use as secondary. As the article made clear, it was a case whereby a twenty-two-year-old man 'forced unprotected sex on women who insisted he wear a condom' and the emphasis on force aligned with more conventional definitions of rape.[43]

Together, the oral testimonies highlight the significance of consent and body autonomy for sex industry workers. Limited access to sex education, coupled with ideas that sex workers were 'assumed to be fair game', had very real impacts on their abilities to set boundaries over their body.[44] At times, individuals internalised these ideas. Across the interviews, narrators located themselves in a community of sex workers, emphasising the solidarity they felt with their peers. In doing so, they rejected nudity or involvement in the sex industry as constituting implied consent, and asserted that sex workers are deserving of the same protection as people in other industries. While this should be obvious, the necessity for narrators to emphasise their rights and their struggles to protect the boundaries they set over their body means it is a point that needs to be made explicitly.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Professionalisation of Sex Work

Shannon was a 'lady of leisure on board a boat. It was stunning back then.' As a teenager in the 1970s, she simultaneously worked from the streets of downtown Auckland and as a ship girl when fishing boats and cargo ships came into port. She fondly reflected on the seafarers who paid her for the evening, covered her flights and taxi fares so they could reunite in different parts of the country, and gave her money to 'get my hair done, get new clothes, get new shoes, get padded bras'. She continued:

> They knew what I was, but they didn't care. Being so young and vulnerable it was just like every girl's dream. Gee, be pampered. They treated me with tender loving care. I never got beaten; quite a few other queens did that were cracking it. They came on to steal, though. For me, it was like, 'Oh, nah.' I actually got to meet them when they were sober. They came around to a friend's place and we'd all be sitting there having a few drinks, and they were sober and they were talking, 'Oh, what do you do? What are you into?' And I go, 'Well, I like guys that treat

> me like a princess' [laughs]. They'd hear that and they'd go, 'Oh okay', and that's the role that they'd play: 'Come on, princess.' They were just awesome, and that was all through sex work.

Like others I interviewed, Shannon was particularly fond of Japanese fishermen, who were not only financially generous but also 'so warm and embracing. They just made you feel special.' The ship girls and seafarers became 'like a family' on board. They socialised together in the mess, at local bars, and at ship girls' houses. She concluded: 'That's just the life of a ship moll, and I loved it.'

Sex work has been described as 'the oldest profession' since the late nineteenth century. Yet how individuals engaged in sex work as a profession has received less attention.[1] Across the interviews, narrators emphasised their honesty, strong work ethics, abilities to attract regular clients and responsibility by paying tax as illustrative of their professionalism. This chapter teases out narrators' memories of work. It begins by focusing on individuals' pride in their occupations. They cited the money they earned and their positive interactions with clients as evidence of their success in the industry. It then moves on to consider how narrators navigated the sexual aspects of the job. While some spoke of treating clients with detachment and indifference, viewing sex work simply as a job like any other, others shared more intimate feelings. The final part of the chapter examines how narrators affirmed their profession by aligning sex work with the values with which they were raised. Together, the oral histories reveal the depth and nuances of sex workers' experiences. These are often overshadowed by popular depictions that either glamorise the industry or denounce it as exploitative and as a last resort for those in desperate situations.

Reconceptualisation of sex work as a legitimate form of labour was at the centre of the international sex workers' rights movement of the 1970s.[2] Speaking at the Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media Conference in San Francisco in 1979, Carol Leigh, an American sex work activist and writer, introduced the term 'sex work' in place of 'prostitution'.[3] The term contested the stigma and shame that she argued relegated sex workers to the margins of the women's movement. Importantly, it conveyed that the exchange of sex for money was indeed a form of work.[4] Sex workers in Aotearoa drew on the language of the sex worker's rights movement to articulate their professionalism. From the late 1980s, *Siren* featured many letters from individuals who proudly identified themselves as, for instance,

'a top-flight, A1 professional who charges top-dollar, because I know I am worth it', 'a professional working lady', and 'professionals [who] treat their clients with respect and they get the same in return'.[5] Further, as Chapter Six outlines, the added challenges posed by the HIV and AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s 'brought a new sense of professionalism to workers in the sex industry'.[6]

Those who emphasised professionalism could be dismayed by others who did not view sex work in the same positive light. In the early 1990s, several workers wrote to the editors of *Siren* to encourage more stories from 'strong, self-empowered, independent and successful working women'.[7] They were frustrated by the 'desperate, degraded, abused victim of society' they felt 'your magazine seems to continually portray', and posited sex work as 'a valuable, healing and indeed honourable occupation if we choose to see the good in it'.[8] The NZPC had promoted *Siren* as a forum 'for all the people in the sex industry' and urged readers to contribute articles, poetry, and letters for publication.[9] Regular columns like 'What Gets on my Goat', which encouraged readers to 'send us your gripes . . . and get it off your chest!' illustrate how the magazine offered sex workers an uncensored space in which to discuss the negative aspects of their work. Yet others resisted the tone of these pieces, especially ones that they felt disparaged clients or focused on drug use. They declared, 'We need psyching up, not that.'[10]

Pride in their professionalism

Shannon's life as a ship girl – sometimes referred to as ship moll or tima (steamer) moll – in inner-city Auckland was far removed from the one that she had experienced growing up in Whangārei with her nan and cousins.[11] Shannon was 'quite flamboyant' as a child and questioned her gender from an early age. She explained, 'I queried others, especially girls. How come I can't wear a dress and they can? How come they can wear pants and I can't wear a dress?' Shannon met a trans person for the first time at the age of fourteen in 1973 when she hitchhiked to Auckland with her classmates for the weekend. She remembered the woman's bright red hair and cleavage, and 'I went, Oh my God! That's what I want to be when I grow up!' The meeting was a turning point. Upon returning to Whangārei:

> I said, 'Nan, I know what I want to be when I grow up.' And she said, 'He aha?' ['What?'] I said, 'I want to be a woman;

> I want to be a transsexual.' And she goes 'He aha te kupu Māori?' ['What's the Māori word?'] And I went [laughs], 'I don't know what it means in Māori but that's what I'm going to be, I'm going to be a woman. And I want you to take me along to the doctors and get me the stilbestrol.' And of course, that was fourteen, by the time I turned fifteen I had little breasts. And at Whangārei Boys' High, you have to take your top off. And I said, 'Oh I can't,' and [the PE teacher] goes, 'Why?' And I said, 'Oh because I'm a woman, I've got breasts' [laughs]. And he goes, 'No, take your top off.' So, I took my top off and he goes, 'Oh no, you can't be going for sports, you can't be doing athletics, you can't be swimming.' And it was like, Oh well, that sucks, I don't want to go to this school anymore.

Shannon left school shortly afterwards and moved to Titirangi in West Auckland to live with her aunt, who had secured her a job as a glazier at Crown Lynn Potteries in the CBD. She explained: 'I thought I was shit hot, 'cause you know, thirteen, fourteen, got a job, got kicked out of school because I had breasts. A real woman!'

Shannon's entry into the sex industry came shortly afterwards when she accompanied her cousin to the Ca' d'Oro, a late-night coffee shop on Customs Street. The Ca' d'Oro opened in the summer of 1955 as one of a growing number of venues in Auckland that welcomed a gay and lesbian clientele.[12] Shannon remembered how 'the wealth of excitement just oozed out of that café': 'There were all these queens there, I was just blown away. I went, Oh my God. I sat there, bought a coffee and something to eat, and we just watched people coming in and out [laughs]. All these queens, eh, it was like, fabulous! I wanted to be part of this group.'

Shannon returned to the Ca' d'Oro a couple of weeks later. She remembered wearing 'high, high shoes, and flared jeans, and a little skimpy top [laughs] and I was a woman'. One of the sex workers in the café advised her to stand on the corner to attract business and to charge no less than $40. That evening turned into a fifteen-year career in the sex industry. Shannon's years as a sex worker were also punctuated by several prison terms for theft: 'I spent about ten years in and out of jail'.

Shannon's emphasis on the money she made and the travel opportunities she enjoyed as a ship girl offered an important defence against

the prejudice that belittled ship girls and street-based workers and favoured those who worked indoors. She explained:

> You had girls from the parlours that all congregated down at the café. They used to think we were all trash. They called us 'gutter trash' [laughs]. Yeah. Oh, all good. They said it as they were leaving. And many times, they were pulled up and beaten. But you know it was like, Pfft. You've got the cheek; we're doing the same job. It's just a different place. . . . They used to think, Well, men pay millions of dollars for this [laughs]. And I used to think, Well, fuck, girl you haven't been on the ships. Come on the ships, they pay for you to fly around the country just to meet them. They give you their wages, a week's wages. What do you get? A couple of bucks? [laughs]. For the night? For an hour or two? Yeah, nah girl. And I sort of really fell in love with that lifestyle.

Another interviewee, Cherida, described these distinctions between workers as the 'whorearchy'. She explained, 'I used to be the worst for thinking that I was somehow different, 'cause I was going to university and I was well travelled and didn't dress in slutty clothes when I was in the brothel. And I used to judge people as well.' It was when she met people who preferred street work for the independence it offered and the ability to make 'just as much money if not more money than people who worked indoors' that 'I just realised that I had it all wrong in the first place and that I just had no idea'.

Sophie shared similarly positive reflections on her work ethic, and especially the money she made, during her years as a street-based worker and ship girl from the age of thirteen in 1970. Her testimony signals a tension between her memories of feeling compelled to start sex work as a young teenager, and the independence she eventually gained in the industry. Sophie described a horrific upbringing. At the time of our interview in 2019, she had started working with a lawyer to lodge a formal complaint over the sexual abuse she endured as a child while in state care, and as an adolescent when she was committed to a psychiatric hospital. She was determined to pursue a case against her main abuser and 'charge the bastard'. Sophie found the $12,000 compensation she previously received to be particularly demeaning: 'And I said, "So you think $4000 a year, that's what I'm worth? To be interfered [with] and raped for three years over and over, is that what

I'm worth?" And I feel really let down.' Those experiences 'still haunt me. It even haunts me now. I'm not wasted, I don't take anything, I don't drink alcohol. And it's all so clear but the *pain* is still there.'

Sophie was born in Auckland in 1957. Her parents met when her father, a young Māori army cadet, moved into a boarding house that her maternal grandparents, from what was then Yugoslavia, owned in Parnell. Their union was short-lived, and Sophie was initially raised by her mother, whom she described as physically and emotionally abusive, and who 'was never given any aroha, so we never got any'. By contrast, 'I only have good memories of my dad, even though he had a lot of problems because he had a mākutu [spell] put on him.'[13] As a toddler, Sophie and one of her five siblings were made wards of the state. They were later sent to the Star of the Sea Convent in Howick for three years, which she described as the place 'that did a lot of damage'. The two children returned to their mother's home for twelve months in 1966, when they were aged eight and nine. It was the 'worst year of my life'. Sophie spent the next five years being 'shipped all over New Zealand' to various boarding schools, foster homes and psychiatric hospitals including Porirua Hospital, Oakley Hospital in Point Chevalier, and Kingseat Hospital in Papakura. She was 'treated like an adult' and given electric shock treatment after she started seeing visions of her father, who had died by suicide four years earlier. She explained, 'I think because of being so tall and looking like an adult they were intimidated by me. Of course, all I wanted was to be a kid. I just wanted to be a kid; I never had a childhood.'

Sophie developed a drug dependency and described 'turning tricks' at the age of thirteen to pay for morphine and cocaine:

> I just thought to myself, Well, everyone had been taking it [from me] so why shouldn't I get paid for it? You know, everyone else was just using and abusing me, so I just started working. And then I started to get to know the contacts and the lingo and all that. I didn't stay [in Wellington] for long, it was just sort of doing the hop, skip and jump, sort of thing. Whatever came my way at the time. I'd hitchhike up to Auckland and just stopped off. And of course, hitchhiking you get picked up by dirty old men, and I was able to make a crust.

Sophie primarily worked in Auckland over the next few decades. At various points, she attracted clients from the bar in the South Pacific

Hotel at the bottom of Queen Street, worked on the streets and the ships, and performed bondage and discipline in a room she hired on Karangahape Road. Like Shannon, Sophie found working on the Japanese fishing boats to be particularly lucrative:

> You just made – in those days it was a lot of money, $1000 a night, two thousand – and you got rental cars, you went shopping every day, you flew everywhere. And then we started on the cargo ships so we went coasting, so we used to go around on the ship to all the New Zealand ports and you'd be with one person. . . . It was good, so I'd make my money on the streets or whatever at that time. And then when I had a ship come in that I had a client on, well then I concentrated on just being with that client. And it wasn't about 'Oh $100 a night' or whatever, you stayed with them, and you got the lot.

Sophie's recall of working on the ships in the early 1970s marked a clear contrast to her memories of starting work and being picked up by older, predatory men. She emphasised her strong work ethic despite her discomfort with sex work: 'To do what I did I had to be wasted. But in saying that, I used to do my job well. Because I believed they're paying you for a service. So, you know, you don't rip them off, and they come back. So that's how it was.' Sophie shared a similar sentiment when she reflected on her work as a stripper at the Purple Onion and Club Exotique in Wellington in her late teenage years. She performed under the stage name The Tall and Torrent Crystal Williams. Her 'good boobs and long legs' were her standout features. She remembered, 'I was a good stripper too. I loved it.'

Sophie's dedication to looking after her clients offers a challenge to the prejudice she faced as an injecting drug user. She continued:

> I always used to look after my clients. 'Cause everyone saw me as this hardliner person 'cause God forbid I was putting a needle in my arm. And none of them did that sort of shit. They drank, popped pills, and smoked dope, that's all they'd really done. But I was a junkie, you know. And God forbid. But I really took on board everything and I didn't undercharge. Then you know, it became a bit harder and there was more competition. So, I was really grateful that I

> had regulars because people would try to undercut or try to bomb you out as they call it, which means taking your clients. Especially on the ship scene if someone asks for you, they'd say, 'Oh no, she's not on the scene any more', just to get that client. So, it sort of became like dog-eat-dog.

The use of heroin became more common in New Zealand in the 1970s as part of a burgeoning drug culture.[14] Depictions in the popular media of drug users as irresponsible and dangerous, and of sex work as synonymous with illicit drug use, gained momentum the following decade with the onset of the HIV and AIDS epidemic.[15] These depictions not only overstated sex workers' use of intravenous drugs, but they also overshadowed the vital roles drug user activists and their allies played in HIV and AIDS prevention. Their actions included lobbying politicians for a needle exchange programme, as was already underway in parts of the UK, in Amsterdam, and in some Australian states.[16] They succeeded in 1987, when the New Zealand government passed the Misuse of Drugs Amendment Bill.[17] The law change allowed pharmacists, medical practitioners and other authorised people to legally supply unused needles and syringes to members of the public on demand, to lessen the risk of these items being shared and reused.[18] Consequently, in 1992, New Zealand's response was celebrated as one that 'leads the world in HIV/AIDS prevention among injecting drug users'.[19]

Speaking to the *Evening Post* in 1989, Detective Sergeant Paul Dimery of the Wellington vice squad challenged the 'myth' of 'drug users turning to prostitution to support their drug habit'.[20] He argued that the number of IV drug users working on the Wellington streets was 'minimal', mostly due to the 'nature of the people in the sex industry at the moment and the scarcity of hard drugs'.[21] Nevertheless, popular images of sex workers that, as one worker argued, 'paint her (or him) as a drugged out, screwed up cheap and nasty low-life nymphomaniac, who pays for her fishnets and t[e]mgesics by preying on innocent men' prevailed.[22] In November 1994, the *Southland Times* published an article that identified 'escorts injecting drugs [as] Southland's greatest hazard in terms of spreading diseases like Hepatitis B and C'.[23] The comments were made by Dr Tony Revel, who worked as the medical director of the Rhanna Clinic's alcohol and drug treatment centre in Southland Hospital, Invercargill. The NZPC countered his claims by arguing that sex workers who used drugs were knowledgeable about safe injecting practices and had access to the needle exchange programme in Southland.[24]

The following month, one Invercargill-based escort condemned the article in a letter to the *Southland Times*. She argued that, on the contrary, she and her colleagues 'are respectable women, some of us with children, who work to make ends meet, not for drug habits'. She concluded, 'this is the 90s and we are not all druggies. . . . Give us a chance.'[25] Her comments highlighted the fraught line workers had to navigate to assert the legitimacy of their jobs. Media studies scholar Gwyn Easterbrook-Smith identifies an 'us vs them' dichotomy in the sex industry, whereby some workers reinforced this division by distinguishing themselves from those working in areas and in ways that were publicly considered disreputable.[26] It is perhaps not surprising that sex workers wanted to distance themselves from drug use and other behaviour that amplified the prejudice against them, especially when their livelihoods were at risk. The author's characterisation of herself and her colleagues as 'decent and respectable ladies', as opposed to the 'druggies' in the industry, was perhaps an effort to protect their incomes 'so close to Christmas when we all very much need the work'.[27]

This is not to downplay the impact that drugs, namely heroin in the 1970s and methamphetamine in the 1990s, have had on the industry, especially among street-based cohorts.[28] From the first issue of *Siren* in November 1988, the editors raised concerns that sex workers who used drugs were less able to protect themselves from HIV and other blood-borne viruses that could be transmitted through unprotected sex or intravenous drug use.[29] They pushed for targeted programmes to reach those who engaged in sex work to support drug dependence. They were concerned not only that drugs could affect the users' judgement, but also that these individuals' economic needs meant they felt more pressure to accept sex without condoms.[30] Their concerns echoed discussions that were underway overseas. Speaking in the Australian context, Raelene Frances' research highlights how workers' need for money to support drug addictions led to them taking more risks and accepting lower rates than they would otherwise tolerate.[31]

Sophie's memories of the 1970s as 'really easy' and 'laid back' resonated across several of the interviews. Many of the people in this book grew up during the 'buoyant economic climate of the 1950s and 1960s', when unprecedented numbers of New Zealanders experienced further education and full-time paid employment opportunities.[32] By the 1970s, New Zealand was considered to have high living standards compared to other countries.[33] The following years marked a clear departure from this 'golden era'. The economic crises of the 1980s and 1990s led to rising

unemployment and poverty, as witnessed by Sophie and others.[34] In 1993, NZPC Auckland reported having 'a difficult time' with police raids, concerns about investigations from the Department of Social Welfare and Inland Revenue, and workers struggling for business with 'clients staying home in droves'.[35] As one writer in *Siren* concluded, 'working in the 90s stinks'.[36] For Sophie, the challenges of working in the 1990s included:

> The girls not using condoms and undercutting, undercharging. And we had to deal with the problem, we had to throw them off the street and things like that. Because the clients would come back and tell us. And there was a lot of dog-eat-dog. But me, I had no problem because I believe if you can't back your mouth keep it shut. And I could back mine. And I *earned* the right to be there. And when you have some fifteen-year-old say to you, 'This is my turf, fuck off,' I'd go, 'Yeah?' [laughs]. I'd throw them away [laughs]. But I enjoyed working. I think you do have to enjoy what you're doing. I was so wasted, though. But I was never wasted enough that I didn't know what I was doing. And I had a lot of regulars. I didn't have to go and stand on the street and work, but I liked to go out there just for the excitement. And I didn't have to. Where[as] a lot of them did to get their rent.

Sophie's treatment of clients paid off when she had enough regulars that she could choose when and where she worked. Her repetition that she 'didn't have to' solicit on the street also emphasises the control she eventually gained over her working situation.

Sophie was not alone in her complaint about workers undercutting one another's prices. In October 1992, one worker wrote to *Siren* to chastise those who provided services for 'well below the normal price' on the streets of Auckland. They urged readers to maintain standard prices in solidarity with their peers and stated, 'Our industry is professional so let's keep it professional.'[37] Others were more forthright in their disdain for the 'culprits who persist in undercutting'. In a letter to *On Top* – the Transsexual Outreach Project's magazine – in 1993, one individual writing from prison urged readers to '"stamp out" this intolerable behaviour'. They confessed, 'I would dearly love to get my hands on some of these creatures who continually throw themselves at clients for a couple of dollars.'[38]

Issues with undercutting were certainly not exclusive to the street. One writer suggested that street-based workers were the only ones in the industry who had managed to maintain stable prices for hand relief, oral sex, and intercourse.[39] Street-based workers' fears of getting a reputation for undercutting and facing retribution from their peers were sufficient motivation.[40] Instead, an 'experienced worker from way back' attributed the downward shift in prices to the increasing number of private workers who advertised half-hour bookings for $50.[41] They encouraged others to 'take your profession seriously, let's lift the standard so we can all get paid what we deserve'. Nevertheless, by the mid-1990s a 'price war' among independent escorts reportedly forced some either to leave the industry or to substantially lower their rates.[42] Others expressed their shock at reading the decreasing prices in adult entertainment columns, which they argued came from cisgender women in massage parlours and escort agencies.[43] The writer urged the workers and managers offering low prices to 'get your act together'.[44] The emphasis on maintaining standard prices was an important mark of professionalism. But it was not the only way sex workers asserted themselves as legitimate businesspeople.

The sex in sex work

Speaking in an interview for the landmark oral history publication *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do* (1974), Roberta Victor, an American sex worker, argued: 'The call girl ethic is very strong. You were the lowest of the low if you allowed yourself to feel anything with a trick. . . . The way you maintain your integrity is by acting all the way through.'[45] The collection featured interviews with over one hundred Americans across various industries about the work they undertook and the meaning they sought in their careers. The inclusion of a sex worker in a book about paid employment in 1974 is itself noteworthy considering how sex workers had to – and continue to – fight to have their work recognised as an occupation. Importantly, Victor's account drew attention to the disconnection some workers maintained as an indicator of their professionalism. It offered an important counterpoint to popular depictions of sex workers that overemphasise the sexual labour of sex work, at the expense of other forms of labour they undertake.[46] Such depictions, Easterbrook-Smith argues, perpetuate stereotypes about sex workers as hypersexual and sideline those who view sex work as a financial means to an end.[47]

Several interviewees spoke of the additional work involved in affirming clients' sexual prowess by acting as though they enjoyed the sex.[48] Kelly explained, 'If the appointments are coming in for pleasure, then they want to think that all the time, they're giving you pleasure too. That's part and parcel of a lot of men. I think it's an ego thing.' Kate remembered the increased pressure on workers to perform in these instances: 'Sometimes guys, especially younger guys or more liberal kind of guys, they would want to turn you on too because they understood that's what you're meant to do with a woman, right? She's meant to enjoy it too. And that's a pain, to be honest. I used to fake orgasms all the time.'

Writing in the June 1994 edition of *Siren*, one writer expressed their exasperation at 'some clients that seem to think that I enjoy having sex with them'. They argued that these clients were the 'worst payers and are always trying to get more out of me without being willing to pay any more money'. Rather, they questioned why these men did not 'act like the other 95% of clients and realise that sex workers are the best actors in the world and that's what they're paying for'.[49] In 1997, researchers at the Christchurch School of Medicine highlighted the 'myth of mutuality' in connection with massage parlour clients who professed an emotional connection with workers and were convinced that sexual pleasure 'was generally a mutually satisfactory affair'.[50] Some clients reported visiting parlours for the massage and spa only, and 'refused to acknowledge any deprivations this imposed on the women', who were not paid for the time they spent massaging and conversing with clients.[51] As the researchers concluded, clients' conviction that workers experienced sexual pleasure was in direct contrast to the views of those who worked in the industry.

Yet not everyone maintained a consistent separation from clients during sex. Catherine remembered having 'a sexually fabulous time' with two of her regular clients. For the most part, however, '[y]ou had that resistance in fact to orgasm, that was kind of in the template as well. Like, it's not about me having sex, it's actually about you paying for sex with me, but it's not about me having sex with you.' Cherida shared clear memories of sex with her first client in 2003. The man spoke little English, and she explained:

> There was this moment when we were having sex that it flashed in my head that I was gonna be paid, and then I had an orgasm. It's quite bizarre. And he was like, 'Is that real?' And I was like, 'Yeah.' I just was like in the middle of it thinking, I'm

> getting paid for this. And then *pshh*. Yeah. It was so bizarre. And so that was a good start, really [laughs]. And he was like 'Really? Real?' And he didn't have any language to string a sentence together, and I was like, is that allowed? And I remember thinking, Oh, am I supposed to . . . what's the rules about this? Am I allowed to enjoy this as well? It was quite weird. It was quite bizarre.

Cherida's uncertainty about whether she should enjoy the sexual encounter is a nod to the separation workers maintained between themselves and their clients. Sex workers shared advice with one another about selecting a working name, preparing a set of responses to deflect clients' questions about their personal lives, and buying specific clothes for work to help them get into character.[52] Many sex workers also maintained a physical distance from clients by following the 'unwritten rules' of sex work. These rules included not kissing clients or letting clients touch them below the waist.[53] In addition, the use of condoms not only served as an important health measure, but also formed a physical and emotional barrier between workers and their clients.[54]

Anna Reed is one of the exceptions regarding sex. As Chapter Two outlined, Anna started sex work at the age of thirty-four in 1977. She had, she recalled, found her calling. When questioned about sex workers shutting themselves off sexually from clients she promptly replied, 'No, it was not like that for me. And I know that my story isn't common. I do know that. I mean, I love great sex and no commitment. Brilliant, great combination [laughs].' Anna's enjoyment of her work perhaps influenced her initial laissez-faire approach to charging clients for her services:

> In the beginning, I used to just say, 'Here's my bag. Feel free to put whatever you want into it.' That was how I liked to operate best of all. And most people would put in what they would normally pay someone else, and occasionally they'd put in more. Occasionally they'd put in much less. I remember a man putting in a dollar; I did think that was a bit stingy [laughs]. But at the same time, I'd said, 'Here's my bag, just put in what you want!' And then when I started working with other people in a parlour, I had to learn to charge whatever they were charging 'cause they'd get really pissed off. Because I was always very popular, and it was because I enjoyed sex!

As Anna mentioned, it was when she left the escort agency and joined a massage parlour in Christchurch that she learned to charge set fees in solidarity with her colleagues. Her ability to charge less also reflected her financial security during the relatively flush decade of the 1970s.

> I was quite overwhelmed by all this money because it was more than I needed. And I did tend to give quite a lot of it away. I mean, it just went wherever it was needed. My mother used to say, 'Oh, why don't you keep your money, you might need to buy a house!' I said, 'Property! I would never own property!' I mean, I was a hippie; you just didn't do things like *that* [laughs].

While Anna was conscious her approach to sex work was in direct contrast to many others in the industry, she was not alone. She remembered attending a workshop with pornographic actress and sex educator Annie Sprinkle at a sex worker symposium in Los Angeles:

> She did this workshop on sacred sex and it [was] a very, very profound experience for me because it was the first time I had been in a room with other sex workers who were going along a similar path to me. I mean not necessarily similar, but they had an understanding of sex work that was deep inside. It was great. I didn't feel alone any more.

Family values and sex work

Many of the people in this book shared stories of growing up in loving families. For them, sex work aligned with, rather than undermined, the values and the strong work ethics with which they were raised. Family values were especially important to Renee, who worked on the streets of Wellington for five years in the early 1980s, before she gained a job as a kitchen hand at the Abel Tasman Hotel. She described a happy childhood. Her whakapapa on her mother's side is Ngāti Kahungunu, and her father has a 'teaspoon of Māori blood, but he's practically Pākehā', and Renee grew up proud of her mixed heritage. She shared fond memories of working as a rouseabout in a shearing shed alongside her siblings and parents, attending Sunday school

lessons, playing team sports, and excelling at mathematics, English and history. When Renee was sixteen, her mother passed away during childbirth. Renee subsequently left school to help raise her eleven younger siblings.

Renee's close relationship with her family was a common thread throughout her life story. As Chapter One outlined, Renee 'changed [her] lifestyle' in 1979 and wrote to her family to inform them she was now living openly as a woman: 'I told them if they didn't agree with my lifestyle that was fine. I would stay in Wellington and never bug them and things like that.' Her family had the opposite response to the one she had dreaded. Renee's father invited her to visit him at his home in Hawke's Bay, and she explained:

> So, I go back Labour Weekend and he wanted to see me dressed up, so I got all dressed up and my sisters took me around to where he was living. When I walked in he started crying, and I'm going, Oh my God, what have I done now? But he was crying in a good way because what he said to me is that I reminded him of my mum, which really hit me too, I went, 'Oh wow.' But he was so supportive. Really, really supportive. He told me that no matter what, he loved me and everything. And then he goes, 'If I love you, your sisters love you. That's all you have to worry about.' And he told me if my aunts and that picked on me, just to tell them to 'go and get effed' [laughs]. And I just looked at him and went, 'Wow' [laughs]. He goes, 'You're family, that's all that matters. And no matter what, you've got our blood,' and he goes 'and I love you until the day you pass away'. I went, 'Oh wow, that's so nice.' So that was like someone had picked a big load off my shoulders. I mean I felt really heavy at first, but as soon as my father spoke to me, everything just disappeared. All that stress and depression, I suppose, that all went away as soon as I spoke to my father. And from that day on, I couldn't wish for a better family. As long as I behave myself and be respectful to other people, that's all my father asked me to do. Which I do.

Renee credited her success during the five years she worked on the street to her dedication to following her father's advice to treat others with respect. She remembered:

> I used to do really well on the streets. Like I said, I only put that down to the person I was. Guys felt safe with me, they knew I wasn't going to rip them off or touch [harm] them. And if they paid for something, they knew they were going to get it. That's what my father taught me. He taught me that when you do a job, you do it properly. He goes, ''Cause if you do it properly, someone will ask you to do it again', sort of thing. He goes, 'It doesn't matter what sort of job it is; the principle is still there. If you treat your clients properly, they'll come back to you.' And I go, 'Okay.' 'Cause I told my dad I was working on the streets, and he goes, 'Really? Are you being safe?' And I go, 'Yeah I'm safe.' And he goes, 'How are the police with you?' And I went, 'The police are actually quite amazing,' and I told Dad what they were like with me. And he goes, 'That's really, really good. You just keep on acting the way you are.' He goes, 'If the police aren't picking on you, you must be doing something right.' He goes, 'I don't agree with it, but I accept the fact that it's your lifestyle and you have to do it to survive.'

Consequently, Renee explained, 'I had a good rep when I was out on the streets, which I think was cool.'

Renee's interview also highlights the depth of some of her engagements with clients and the myriad skills involved in sex work. She reflected on spending more time conversing with clients than offering sexual services:

> A lot of my clients, not even 50 per cent of them were sex. I did a lot of talking when I worked on the streets [laughs]. For example, I had a client that I saw every Friday night at eight o'clock, I used to call him my cookie man. Well, he used to come pick me up on the corner of Abel Smith Street and Cuba Street, so I'd be all ready, waiting for him to pick me up. Go around to his place, I used to walk in, and he'd go to me, 'Vanilla wine biscuits?' I'd go, 'Yes please.' He goes, 'Butter or no butter?' I used to go to him, 'Put the butter on.' So, I used to get two vanilla wine biscuits and put the butter on it and there'd be a cup of tea. And he used to pay me $100 just for

> doing that, but if I didn't have the butter on, he only gave me $60. So, every time I walked in I went, 'Put the butter on!' [laughs]. And that was him, I never ever had sex with him.

Renee's testimony speaks to the complex interactions between workers and clients. She remembered betting on horse races with clients, and clients who approached her for relationship advice. For Cherida, the affection some clients felt towards her was mutual. She likened her interactions with regular clients to visiting the same beauty therapist or hairdresser over time: 'You just build a relationship, and you like them, they're nice people.' It is this compassion for others that one male sex worker, writing in *PUMP* in 1994, identified as the 'powerful positive heritage' of sex workers.[55]

The significance of sex work as an industry where narrators could express the values with which they were raised also emerged in Kim's testimony. She was born in Southend, England, and immigrated to Whangārei with her family at the age of eight. She started sex work in Auckland nearly three decades later in the 1990s. Kim had a full-time position in a factory and was searching for a second job to save money to buy a new car. Her sister suggested that, because 'I liked sex so much, why didn't I just do sex work as my second job?' Kim decided to 'give it a go'. It seemed to be an easy decision, especially considering 'I didn't realise it was against the law or anything like that, so I never registered on the police register [laughs]'. Kim initially planned to work in a parlour and visited a few establishments, but 'there was a particular type of woman that was in the parlours. And I did not fit that type: tall, slender.' Parlour work was therefore not an option for her at that time. Instead, she responded to an advertisement for work in a private house and later advertised her services in *NZ Truth* and the *New Zealand Herald*. I interviewed Kim in 2019, just as she was preparing to retire from sex work at the age of fifty-four to focus on her career as a social worker.

Kim remembered being particularly open about sex work from the outset. She nonchalantly explained, 'I was the only one that actually showed my face in the *Truth*, because my family knew. So, I didn't have to worry about who saw me and who didn't because I wasn't working any other jobs, so it didn't matter.' She attributed her ability to inform her parents of her work to their open-mindedness, and her being in her mid-thirties and having lived away from her home town for well over a decade before she started sex work:

> When I told my family what I was going to do, my dad said I had to do it properly. So, I started paying tax from the word go, just about. So, I was classed as a stress relief therapist [laughs], that's what my business title was. So yes. I paid tax and that's why my father said, 'You've gotta do it properly.'

For Kim, and for many other sex workers, paying tax served as a marker of the values of honesty and integrity with which they had been raised.

From the early 1990s, *Siren* featured letters from workers who attested to their heightened self-esteem as among the key advantages of disclosing their earnings and paying tax, even if they had to conceal exactly what their jobs entailed. They also cited the practical benefits of having proven income, which included potentially being able to secure bank loans and hire purchases.[56] One writer depicted paying tax as validation that 'sex work is simply another job and can be seen as such' even if they had to identify themselves as 'a hostess, entertainer, model or whatever'.[57] Yet not everyone was in favour of paying tax. One interviewee refrained from disclosing her earnings in the mid-2000s as she felt doing so would signal her permanence in the industry. She explained, 'It all felt really permanent, paying tax and having to tick a box that said "I'm a sex worker", even though you don't. But it felt like if I do that, then that's what I'm doing for a long period of time, and [yet] it always felt like a transient job.'

Though sex work was not considered a legitimate occupation under the law, sex workers were still legally obliged to declare their income and pay tax as they would in other industries. In August 1992, the Inland Revenue Department (IRD) announced it would establish a specialist unit – which became the Special Audit Unit – to investigate tax evasion from illegal activities. The Australian Taxation Office had established a similar unit in 1987, and reportedly identified '$200 million in taxes owed from the profits of organised crime'.[58] In New Zealand, the Special Audit Unit was the result of an agreement between the IRD commissioner and police commissioner to exchange information, when permitted under tax laws, to support their investigations.[59] The Unit appears to have initially focused on independent marijuana growers. By 1996, its focus had turned to the sex industry. It aimed to 'permeate the secretive veil surrounding the industry' with the assumption that 'there are more than 8000 sex workers in New Zealand, of which a tiny minority – perhaps one percent – pay their taxes'.[60] By 1999, the *Listener* reported that the 'small, secretive team, the "black ops" of tax inspecting' had claimed $20 million per year in unpaid taxes.[61]

Concerns about investigations into tax evasion within the industry materialised. In December 1999, the coordinator of NZPC Auckland noted the IRD 'were not getting enough people coming into the tax system on a voluntary basis, so now they have decided to be pro-active again'.[62] The following June, as part of their national campaign to tax earnings from sex workers, the Special Audit Unit reportedly sent letters to 'an undisclosed number' of sex workers in Christchurch that demanded records of their earnings. The Unit's controversial decision to obtain workers' names and addresses from the police registers under Section 17 of the Tax Administration Act, and then to send letters en masse, outraged business owners. Fourteen of seventeen staff at one parlour consequently left the industry out of fear they could be charged with tax fraud or benefit fraud.

From the late 1990s, *Siren* had started to regularly publish information on tax, which the Special Audit Unit had written – at *Siren*'s request – specifically for sex workers. It included advice on deducting the money they spent on condoms, lubricants, shift fees, costumes, advertising and other expenses, whether to identify themselves as independent contractors or as employees, and the possibilities of having their back taxes written off under the Tax Administration Act 1994.[63] From May 2000, IRD produced a series of information guides for private operators that focused on their tax obligations and offered advice on claiming expenses. They reminded readers that tax laws 'do not differentiate between legal and illegal income', and that sex workers had the same obligations as people in other industries to pay tax. The moralising language from the IRD was particularly strong. It claimed those who did not declare their income were 'not making their contribution to society' when taxes are used to fund health, welfare and education.[64] Concerns about tax evasion were not limited to the sex industry or other criminalised activities. The 1990s witnessed 'a recent resurgence of interest in the hidden economy', with a particular focus on independent tradespeople who exchanged services for cash payments. In doing so, they and other evaders 'shift[ed] the burden in the direction of honest, socially responsible, individuals and corporations'.[65]

In an editorial for the sex worker newsletter *Between the Sheets Quarterly*, the authors argued that while Inland Revenue required people to declare their income from sex work, 'other government departments don't recognise their work as legitimate and, therefore, people in the industry are not eligible for the benefits to which they contribute their tax dollars'.[66] The editorial was in response to Alliance Party MP Laila Harré's private member's

bill for twelve weeks' paid parental leave in 1998. The authors argued that the Bill represented the 'contradictions facing people working in the sex-industry', especially considering 'a specific group of women is excluded from the programme'.[67]

Sex workers' anger at being excluded from government benefits had been at the centre of the sex workers' rights movement since the 1970s. In 1975, sex workers in Lyon demanded a tax system that would grant them the same retirement benefits as other French citizens.[68] The following decade, the newly formed International Committee on Prostitutes' Rights included a statement on tax in their 1985 World Charter for Prostitutes' Rights. The Charter featured a set of principles to protect sex workers' human rights. It specified that sex workers 'should pay regular taxes on the same basis as other independent contractors and employees and should receive the same benefits'.[69] In April 1994, *Siren* published a letter from the English Collective of Prostitutes' spokesperson Niki Adams, who argued that sex workers should not be required to pay tax given they were denied the 'same basic human, legal, economic and civil rights as other workers'. Adams reasoned that in addition to workers already paying an 'unreasonably high level' of taxes, many women in the industry also paid tax in the form of fines for loitering and soliciting.[70]

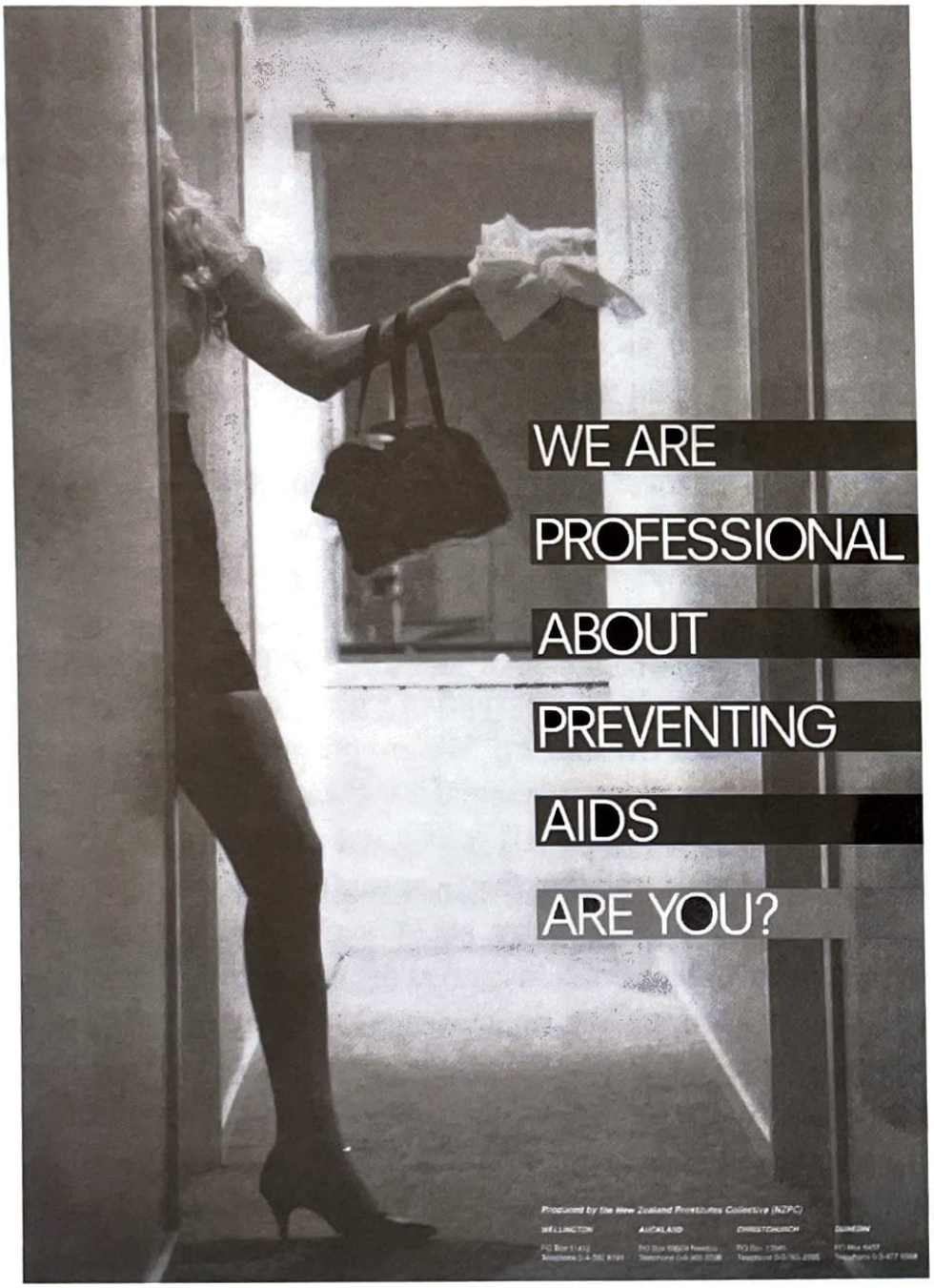
Authorities' focus on tax evasion in the sex industry underpinned some of the general opinions about the sex industry: that it was illegitimate and fraudulent. Sex workers, in turn, had to prove their legitimacy by paying tax, even if they were denied the benefits of doing so. Narrators' emphases on the positive aspects of their work perhaps serve as a reaction against the negative stereotypes that discredited their integrity and skills. They maintained that they were honest professionals engaged in a decent occupation. Even those who resented sex work spoke of their pride in how they conducted their work, and their positive treatment of clients. They rejected popular negative depictions that condemned sex work as a threat to family values. Others navigated a more fraught line, which included subscribing to stereotypes that positioned sex workers against one another. The significance of sex work as a profession also emerged in their responses to HIV and AIDS, as the following chapter examines.

CHAPTER SIX

Sex Workers' Health and Safety

In July 1990, the New Zealand Prostitutes' Collective released its first official safe sex poster. It featured a photograph of a blonde woman emerging from behind a doorway, with the caption 'We are professional about preventing AIDS, are you?' The poster encapsulated key messages the NZPC advocated in its early response to HIV and AIDS: that sex workers were informed and responsible professionals, and that they were united in their determination to keep the virus out of the sex industry. NZPC staff and volunteers distributed copies of the poster at their drop-in centres in Wellington and Auckland, and at local massage parlours when the managers permitted, and featured it in their community magazine, *Siren*. To their horror, *Siren*'s external publisher added the headline 'Have you got it?' to the page that featured the poster. It might now seem obvious the 'it' referred to the poster and not HIV. Yet in a climate where sex workers were blamed for the spread of what was then an untreatable and highly feared virus, such questions were especially jarring to the magazine's sex worker readership. The headline is one of many examples of sex workers' safe sex efforts being – sometimes unintentionally – undermined by those outside of the industry.

The outbreak of HIV and AIDS in the early 1980s once again brought the spotlight on sex workers' sexual health. Public depictions of sex workers as posing a threat to their clients were eerily reminiscent of nineteenth-century contagious diseases legislation under which sex workers – and



Safe sex poster, 1990. New Zealand Prostitutes' Collective

women suspected of being sex workers – were subjected to mandatory genital examinations and quarantine.[1] Yet, as Australian historian Raelene Frances argues, sex workers in the 1980s were in a stronger position than those in the nineteenth century to 'intervene in these debates'.[2] For the most part, public health officials in New Zealand and Australia worked in cooperation with, rather than in opposition to, affected communities. The Labour governments in both countries financed community groups to develop and disseminate peer-based preventative education within their networks.[3] These included the gay community-led New Zealand AIDS Foundation (NZAF) in 1985; the IV League, led by injecting drug user activists, in 1987; and the NZPC in 1988. On one level, their actions reflected the principles of the World Health Organization's Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (1986), which, in the context of HIV and AIDS, encouraged governments to support community-led prevention.[4] Sociologist Bronwen Lichtenstein has identified the New Zealand government's partnership with community groups as one that 'fits the social-progressive paradigm for which New Zealand is known'.[5] Yet, as she later points out, the government's willingness to allocate funding and logistical support to these groups also reflected its concerns that '"promiscuous" women and gay men as the vectors of sexually transmitted disease' would spread sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV to the wider community.[6]

This chapter focuses on sex workers' health and safety, specifically on the HIV and AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s. It locates their responses to the epidemic in a history of sex workers taking charge of their sexual health by conducting visual examinations of clients, voluntarily undergoing regular health checks, and insisting on the use of condoms. It highlights how sex worker activists collaborated with medical professionals to establish free and accessible sexual health clinics for those working in the industry, while also considering how the prejudice attached to sex work impeded some people from accessing these services. For workers on visitor visas, engaging with the health system carried the extra concern that they would come to the attention of immigration officers. Sustaining safe sex measures was especially difficult when police reportedly seized condoms and safe sex literature as evidence for prosecution. Some sex workers continued to face barriers to safe sex even after decriminalisation in 2003. The oral histories reveal instances when parlour managers either failed to advise workers about safe sex – despite being legally required to do so under the Prostitution Reform Act – or actively discouraged staff from using condoms.

On a broader level, this chapter traces the support for safe sex and teases out some of the tensions that emerged as many sex workers mobilised to establish a community-based response to one of the biggest sexual health crises of the late twentieth century.

Developing a national response to HIV and AIDS

The onset of the HIV and AIDS epidemic in the early 1980s mobilised a group of sex workers in Wellington to establish the first sex worker-led organisation, the NZPC. By the time the founding members held their first meeting in 1987, some sex workers had accessed information and support from other government-funded HIV-prevention organisations. These included the NZAF and the IV League.[7] Yet the founding members noted the absence of a group that focused on the particular needs of sex industry workers.[8] With financial support from the Department of Health, they aimed to 'reach those working in the sex industry, spread the safe sex message and fight discrimination against this, the oldest profession'.[9]

In 1988, the NZPC signed a contract with the Department of Health to develop a community-based national response to HIV and AIDS. This included establishing community drop-in centres, producing a regular magazine, strengthening networks with sex workers across Aotearoa, and organising a nationwide condom distribution programme.[10] Lichtenstein argues that collaboration with the Department 'gave sex workers a long-awaited opportunity for organisational empowerment and the means by which to function as a collective "voice"'.[11] Such a voice was especially important considering the inflammatory media reports that blamed sex workers for the spread of HIV and AIDS. These included articles in the *Sunday News* that claimed a 'crazed hooker' at an Auckland massage parlour 'believed she was infected with the deadly virus by one of the customers . . . and was now on a "revenge trip" against all punters'.[12] As public health scholar Jane Chetwynd argued, 'Without an organisation for the media to contact, there was little opportunity to correct this misinformation and affect a more realistic portrayal of the important role of sex workers in the prevention of HIV/AIDS.'[13]

It is important to emphasise that gay activists in Aotearoa had taken the lead in educating themselves and others about the epidemic from the early 1980s, even before HIV, the virus responsible for AIDS, was identified in 1983. The National Gay Rights Coalition, founded in 1977, was especially

proactive about writing, publishing and disseminating some of the earliest AIDS information and prevention material, which it shared with the Department of Health.[14] This began with a piece on the front page of its community newsletter *Pink Triangle* in September 1981, three months after the first report of what is now known as AIDS (the term AIDS was used from 1992) in the United States, and over two years before New Zealand had its first confirmed case. In addition to providing help and advice, the Coalition aimed to refute public perceptions of AIDS as a 'gay cancer' or 'gay plague'. This included urging the media to 'curb their emotive reporting on the AIDS crisis, [which] was aiding the spread of misinformation'.[15]

Further, from 1984, members of the AIDS Support Network – under the initial leadership of co-founder Bruce Burnett (1954–1985) – lobbied the government for financial and practical support to prevent the spread of the virus. They ran education programmes and trained volunteers on how to care for people with AIDS-related conditions.[16] The AIDS Support Network became the New Zealand AIDS Foundation in June 1985, and then the Burnett Foundation Aotearoa in 2022. Its actions reflected that of its international counterparts, which drew on the networks they had developed during the gay liberation movements of the previous decades to establish proactive and effective community-based responses to the global epidemic.[17]

The cohesion gay activists displayed was less apparent across the sex industry. It was, as Catherine Healy reflected, 'a community of communities'. Sex worker activists were therefore developing networks with those in other sectors of the industry – including street workers, ship girls, parlour workers and private escorts – in tandem with their sexual health initiatives. The NZPC received its first instalment of funding in October 1988 and established a drop-in centre on Wellington's Cuba Street where workers could access information about safe sex, as well as subsidised safe sex products including condoms, lubricants, and dental dams. Its community magazine, *Siren*, became an important forum for those working in the sex industry to encourage others to sustain safe sex practices as a marker of solidarity with their peers.[18] From the first issue in November 1988, the editors urged readers to take a 'not negotiable' stance on the use of condoms. They reasoned that if all sex workers consistently practised safe sex, they 'wouldn't get so many (if any) clients wanting unsafe sex and offering more for such dangerous practices. They'd soon get the message and stop arguing.'[19] Such explicit peer-delivered advice on condom use was vital considering condom advertising was severely restricted until September 1990 under the

Contraception, Sterilisation, and Abortion Act 1977. The use of creative safe sex campaigns continued in the 1990s. In 1994, the NZPC released a video exclusively for sex workers, *Sold on Safe Sex,* that featured sex workers using condoms with clients. Further, from its first issue in October 1997, *Between the Sheets Quarterly* – a sex industry magazine that was shared with massage parlours and escort agencies, and online via their password-protected website – also published advice for workers on using condoms and dental dams for oral and penetrative sex.[20]

Trans and whakawāhine sex workers were instrumental to the development of the NZPC from its inception. They volunteered at the drop-in centres in Auckland and Wellington, distributed condoms to street-based workers, and wrote pieces on safe sex and other topics to be published in *Siren*.[21] Their actions became more visible nationally when they established On Top (Ongoing Network – Transsexual Outreach Project) in Wellington and launched their eponymous newsletter within *Siren* in June 1992.[22] *On Top* featured content specific to trans workers. The editors advised readers to carefully remove any tape after tucking – flattening their genitalia – to avoid any damage to their skin and to abstain from sex until their skin had completely healed from surgery. They cautioned readers that any exchange of bodily fluids put them at risk of contracting HIV.[23] By 1999, which the editors identified as the Year of the Transgendered Street Worker in New Zealand, On Top members had produced and started distributing safe sex work packs to street-based workers, and at Chrissy Witoko's Evergreen Coffee House in Wellington.[24]

Pride and Unity for Male Prostitutes (PUMP) took the lead in promoting safer sexual behaviour among male sex workers. On one level, its work intersected with that of the NZAF, the gay community-led organisation that primarily focused on HIV and AIDS prevention among gay men and other men who had sex with men. Yet PUMP was the first organisation to explicitly focus on male sex workers. Its magazine featured safer sex tips for men working with male and female clients, including using extra strength condoms and dental dams, and clarified that using two condoms at the same time was not better than one and could instead lead to breakages.[25] PUMP originated in Wellington and its main outreach took place in the capital city. In 1993, however, NZPC Auckland appointed a male outreach worker who handed out condoms and safe sex information to male street-based workers on Pitt Street and K Road, from the NZPC's drop-in centre, and at parlours and male escort agencies.[26]

In September 1985, condoms became available at most major supermarkets and superettes as part of 'an innovative sales campaign' from the local supplier of the Lifestyle condom brand.[27] Customers were no longer restricted to buying them from pharmacies. Nevertheless, even when people were informed about the value of safe sex, many found condoms expensive and embarrassing to purchase.[28] A 1992 study into low condom use in New Zealand reported that '[b]ecause sex was often regarded as taboo or "dirty", so too were condoms'. Consequently, 'straight-forward communication about where to get them and how to use them properly' was severely restricted.[29] Others shared this embarrassment. One contributor to *Siren* reflected on her shame at being turned away from chemists who did not stock enough condoms to fill her prescription. She stated, 'You may as well have a red light and sign dangling above your head screaming sex worker because, hey, sex work and condoms went hand in hand. And for that we were made to feel shameful.'[30] Catherine Healy remembered paying $18 for a pack of twelve condoms from an after-hours pharmacy. The experience was 'incredibly embarrassing to be going and getting condoms. It was like you had a big W on your forehead and everyone knew you were a sex worker. So, all of us hated getting our condoms, because we felt so exposed.'

Catherine reflected on the NZPC's role in making condoms more accessible to the sex worker population. She also remembered the struggle of buying condoms in bulk to distribute to other workers:

> We were having to buy them from Family Planning. We were having to pay for the script and there was never enough either, we couldn't get enough. And we had to give names, so we all had to volunteer our names and our addresses, so in essence there was this list of people held by Family Planning. Sometimes we'd have to make up names and addresses, and some people would go through the phone book and pull out addresses. So, heavens knows what's there in the early history. But that system was a bit frustrating because we wanted to manage it ourselves, and it was always a bit of an irritant that it was quite hard to get condoms. So, over time that system changed and we came on and built a relationship with the condom companies directly and then we could purchase condoms. And we'd have to pay quite a lot of money. Like a Durex gross today, 2011, is somewhere around about $13, but back then it was over $100.

> It was a lot of money. So, it took a lot of different kinds of things, condom wars and heaps of stuff when I think about it.

On 1 December 1992, sex worker activists in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin also distributed condoms and safe sex literature on the streets in recognition of World AIDS Day.[31] Peer-delivered safe sex messages emphasised positive approaches to sex that marked a clear departure from those that pushed for abstinence. In December 1988, the *New Zealand Medical Journal* published an article on 'the ethics of safe sex' which denounced safe sex as 'inadequate'. The authors, from the schools of Engineering and Law at the University of Auckland, argued that society should be 'fearless' in promoting fidelity within committed relationships, and chastity outside of relationships. They questioned, 'Ought not doctors challenge the rightness of the values (or lack of values) being expressed in the encouragement of sexual promiscuity?'[32] The following year, Catholic bishops in New Zealand denounced safe sex messages as 'medically misleading and morally wrong'. Instead, they appealed to young people to 'uphold their dignity through chastity'.[33] They were not alone. In the mid-1980s, some doctors overseas claimed that the argument for using condoms was 'based on the "better than nothing" theory'.[34] They proclaimed abstinence as the only effective strategy to stop the spread of the virus. The terror caused by HIV and AIDS also generated heated discussions among gay activists overseas and in New Zealand over whether a sex-positive culture should continue in the face of the epidemic.[35]

The use of condoms was not the only way sex workers took charge of their sexual health. As this chapter goes on to outline, sexual health checks were a regular and important feature of many narrators' lives both before and after the onset of HIV and AIDS.

Sex workers as sexual health experts

From the late 1980s, many sex workers argued that they were not only more informed about safe sex measures, but also more assertive about using condoms than people outside of the industry. It was this expertise in people's sexual behaviour and attitudes that Catherine Healy and Anna Reed from the NZPC argued meant sex workers were 'the ideal transmitters of safer sex practice'.[36]

Anna remembered her resistance to condoms when she began working for an outcall massage agency in the late 1970s:

> I was a hippie and condoms were just so unnatural. And I thought they were revolting things. And I always had them with me, but I really didn't instigate their use much. And in my first year of working, I had gonorrhoea seven times. I used to go down to the sexual health clinic every second Friday for a check-up. And they were really good to me. I mean, they knew what I was doing, they never preached at me, they would just give me my shot of antibiotics. And I thought, God, how much antibiotics have I got in my system? And then I'd sort of think, Oh, I should use condoms, then I wouldn't. Sometimes I would and sometimes I wouldn't. It wasn't until I was sitting there waiting for my appointment one day and I saw the nurse leading this woman out and she was in tears. And I went in and I said to the nurse, 'Oh, that poor woman, she looked really upset.' And she said, 'Oh, her husband went astray and went to a massage parlour and gave her something.' And the penny dropped. I suddenly understood my responsibility in society.

Considering the emphasis on sex workers' responsibilities for enforcing the use of condoms, many were dismayed by public assumptions, especially in the media, that they posed a threat to the health of their clients and by extension, their clients' sexual partners outside of the industry. As one author in *Siren* declared, 'no one asks or cares how prostitutes themselves might become infected'.[37]

Others, like Anna, certainly appear to have embraced their roles as safe sex educators. Writing in the February 1992 edition of *Siren*, one author declared it was their 'duty' to be well informed about STIs and HIV and AIDS. Not only was it pertinent to their health, but also 'we often have to act as educators to our clients on these very subjects'. They argued that clients were 'often ignorant of all things to do with sexually transmitted diseases'. Clients were not malicious; they simply did not realise the importance of condoms.[38] Such naïvete appears to have been reasonably commonplace among heterosexuals, despite rising HIV diagnoses among this cohort of the population across the late 1980s and 1990s.[39] In 1987, AIDS educators in Auckland reported struggling to engage heterosexual men who 'just *refuse* to believe it's got anything to do with them'.[40] Three years later in November 1990, the monthly Auckland-

based magazine *Metro* published a nine-page spread in response to the controversial American text *The Myth of Heterosexual AIDS* (1990). While the article likened a heterosexual person's risk of contracting the virus in New Zealand to 'the chance of being struck by lightning', it concluded that 'the risk, if minuscule, is a reality'.[41]

The focus on sex workers' responsibilities to enforce the use of condoms perhaps enabled clients to take a less proactive approach to safe sex. Academic researchers found that many sex workers consistently sustained safe sex practices.[42] Yet clients were not always receptive to these messages. Writing in the first issue of *Siren*, one author expressed anger at clients who resisted using condoms 'for the usual variety of reasons'. In such instances, it was 'up to us to give the stupid guy a lecture on the dangers of non-condom use'. They warned readers that these clients probably had unprotected sex often and were '*more* likely to have something wrong'.[43] Another contributor echoed this message in the May 1991 issue. They reported that '[t]here are, amazingly, still people out there who believe that all the little nasties that crawl around in people's penis[es] and vaginas are never going to get into them! (Hold on fellas while I put up the force-field!!)'[44] They were particularly frustrated by some clients' 'one in a million excuse' that 'someone else didn't use one!' and exclaimed, 'You really expect me, or anyone else, to jump into the proverbial sack with you knowing that lot? You have got to be joking!! As if I really want someone else's bugs as well as yours! I'd rather go skin-diving with piranhas, thanks anyway.'[45]

Many clients, however, were evidently reluctant to change their habits. In 1993, researchers from the Christchurch School of Medicine released the findings of their study into male parlour clients' knowledge of HIV and AIDS. They found that clients often relied on sex workers' knowledge about sexually transmitted infections, and over 20 per cent of the clients they interviewed had discussed HIV and AIDS with a woman sex worker.[46] Significantly, the clients they interviewed reported that they expected sex workers and their sexual partners to not only provide the condom, but also to place the condom on them before sex.[47]

Kelly remembered taking charge of her sexual health well before the onset of HIV and AIDS when she worked in Australia. Her actions included conducting visual examinations of parlour clients in the early 1980s and paying particular attention to any signs of discolouration on their genitalia. She acknowledged the strategy was certainly not ideal, but 'it was the best we had at the time':

> You have a check-up 'cause there were no condoms being used in the early 1980s. They were used if a client requested they be used, but it was not something that was really used. They were checked by the girls; the girls would check the clients in the best way they could. We were taught by the doctors. 'Cause the doctors used to come in and check us every week. The slightest suspicion, if a doctor could see there was something maybe wrong when giving you an internal physical, he would suggest you didn't work until the results came back. So, we didn't work until the results came back. They also taught us how to look for things, how to feel for warts, and how to look for herpes.

Kelly was especially in favour of regular health checks. She remembered arranging for a doctor to visit the parlour to save workers the inconvenience and cost of making a trip to their general practitioner. Discussions about the benefits of health checks perhaps overshadow the financial strain on those who tested positive for an STI and had to temporarily stop work. There was also a significant difference between individuals taking charge of their health care by voluntarily undergoing physical examinations – as was the case with Kelly – and being forced to do so, as some were by the mid-1990s.

Writing in the April 1995 issue of *Siren*, one contributor reported that 'a lot' of managers were calling for sex workers to provide medical certificates to prove they had tested negative for STIs. They noted, 'Sadly I've heard a lot of sex workers calling for the same sort of thing.'[48] The author cautioned readers that health checks would only make it harder to enforce condoms with clients who did not appreciate the risks they posed to sex workers. They exclaimed, 'because after all they are going to say that we are clean so what infection can we possibly give them!!! Not all of them will be ignorant, but believe me some will definitely view it that way because in their minds it is us that infects them and not the other way around.'[49] The following year, 1996, another worker wrote to *Siren* to express her anger at being forced to produce monthly health certificates as a 'gross and unnecessary invasion of my privacy'.[50] They argued that managers do not ask clients for health certificates, yet 'it's the client who asks for sex without a condom, not the other way around!'[51] The limited validity of health checks – they failed to account for the window period between transmission and infection being

detectable, and a negative result was only applicable until the individual's next sexual encounter – was well recognised. As noted above, calls for health checks were also problematic as they focused solely on sex workers. There was little discussion, especially outside of the sex industry, about requiring clients to provide evidence that they had undergone a sexual health check before they visited a worker.

Despite sex workers' efforts in HIV and AIDS prevention, negative stereotypes that denounced sex workers as vectors of infection prevailed. In June 1997, the NZPC and the NZAF released a joint media statement that contested 'completely unfounded' claims that there were up to thirty HIV-positive male sex workers employed in Auckland escort agencies. They condemned the 'generalised threats' male escorts had received from the police to either stop working or be charged for endangering clients, and argued that such threats served only as a 'disincentive to sex workers to get tested and to seek advice about their health'.[52] They acknowledged it was illegal to knowingly endanger a sexual partner – as specified in a 1989 amendment to the Crimes Act – and confirmed that community organisations would support the prosecution of any individual in such cases.[53] Yet they reinforced that clients and workers were equally responsible for insisting on safe sex.[54]

Sex workers in Aotearoa had certainly been made aware of the severe ramifications of having any HIV diagnoses within the sex industry. They were particularly outraged by the forced hospitalisation of Sharleen Spiteri, an HIV-positive sex worker in Australia, in 1989. For many, the Australian government's treatment of Sharleen encapsulated their frustration over the fact that women sex workers, rather than their clients, were punished for unprotected sex. In a letter to the *Evening Post*, Catherine Healy reported that the decision to detain Sharleen rather than her clients 'cocoons these clients from taking responsibility for their own actions'.[55] The Australian media's focus on Sharleen, beginning with her interview in the *Australian* magazine in July 1989 under the pseudonym Marianne, is well documented. Sharleen explained that while she insisted on using condoms, some clients removed them during sex without her knowledge or consent. She also described a vicious attack whereby a man raped her without using a condom.[56] That same year, however, a now infamous follow-up report by the current affairs show *60 Minutes* deemed Sharleen 'more dangerous than a serial killer' and alleged that she continued to have sex with clients without using condoms.[57] The New South Wales Department of Health – which, as others have identified, had been aware of Sharleen's HIV-positive status for at least three years –

subsequently ordered that she be forcibly detained at Prince Henry Hospital for an unspecified period.[58] Sharleen remained under supervision for the next sixteen years until her death in 2005.

Free and accessible clinics

In addition to being forced to undergo health checks and share the results with employers, many sex workers struggled to access appropriate sexual health services where they felt they could openly discuss their sexual encounters and concerns with understanding doctors.[59] NZPC representatives addressed these issues at the first National AIDS Conference in 1989.[60] They argued for health professionals to recognise the role sex workers played in educating the public about the risks of HIV and AIDS, and brought attention to the prejudice some industry workers had faced from doctors and nurses.[61] Trans workers at the conference, in particular, shared instances of being misgendered and dismissed by women's clinics who referred them to men's clinics.[62] The NZPC responded to these issues by collaborating with sexual health staff to establish inclusive health services with trusted medical professionals.

In 1993, the NZPC established a health clinic within Take-A-Break, where medical staff from the Auckland Sexual Health Centre provided smear tests and STI checks, among other health services. The Pitt Street Methodist Church had established Take-A-Break two years earlier in 1991 as a sex worker-friendly women's drop-in centre off K Road.[63] Trans sex workers staffed the drop-in centre four evenings a week and distributed condoms, lubricant, information on ugly mugs, magazines, tea, coffee and videos, and provided access to a bathroom.[64] The volunteers also circulated copies of *Siren* among Auckland's street-based population and drove workers to sexual health appointments at the Burnett Centre.[65] The Centre had opened in July 1986, after members of the AIDS Support Network liaised with the Auckland Hospital Board to secure a venue to provide discreet HIV counselling and testing. It continued to offer a space for people who felt marginalised by mainstream health services.

NZPC staff and volunteers also established free sexual health clinics at their drop-in centres around the country. This began with the Cuba Street Clinic – a joint venture between NZPC Wellington, the National People Living with AIDS Union, and Wellington Information and Drug Education – at their shared premises on 3 June 1993.[66] Health care workers from the

Wellington Sexual Health Service and the New Zealand Family Planning Association, who were selected 'for their nonjudgemental attitude and expertise', provided the comprehensive sexual health care.[67] The Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch NZPC drop-in centres expanded their services over the next three years. In addition to offering full sexual health checks, they also provided HIV testing, tests for Hepatitis B and C, liver function tests, contraception, and vaccinations against Hepatitis B.[68] They reassured the community that 'our medical staff are sensitive to sex worker issues (you can tell them anything and they won't blink an eye)'.[69] The establishment of peer-managed sexual health clinics also helped patients avoid what one NZPC volunteer described as the 'stress of repetitive self-disclosure'.[70] They enabled individuals to discuss sex worker-specific health issues with doctors, which included checking their clients for STIs and working while menstruating.[71]

The prevailing prejudice attached to sex work meant some people continued to struggle to access sexual health services. In 1995, one worker asked the NZPC to post them forms to undergo anonymous testing for STIs and HIV. They reasoned that they 'could not risk being seen visiting the NZPC'.[72] For some individuals, these concerns continued after decriminalisation. Frankie worked in massage parlours in Auckland in 2004, and again in 2006. She described being particularly wary about prejudice from her doctor if she disclosed her work in the sex industry. She opted to visit the NZPC's sexual health clinic on K Road, and described it as 'the most terrifying place I've ever been to. I was so nervous! And I remember going, Oh my God, okay, what if someone sees me? I'm walking into the Prostitutes' Collective! Like, you are only there for one reason. I don't even know why I cared so much.'

Cherida recounted a similar experience visiting the sexual health clinic at the NZPC drop-in centre on Willis Street in Wellington in the mid-2000s. She explained: 'I remember just going in like a bolt because I didn't want anyone to see me. 'Cause even though my close friends knew, I didn't want people to know.'

Collaboration with Thai health educators

In late 1990, the NZPC started working with a Thai health educator to engage with Thai sex workers, who were predominantly employed in massage parlours in Auckland. They were conscious that several women were not

able to read or write in Thai and had limited English, so they produced an audio recording in Thai that offered listeners information on sexual health.[73] The following year in October 1991, the Auckland Sexual Health Service (ASHS) established a weekly clinic for Thai sex workers in the Wallace Block of Auckland Hospital, which also housed the Burnett Centre.[74]

Yet despite employing a Thai registered nurse with experience in safe sex education, staff at the ASHS initially struggled to access the community. They cited language barriers and Thai workers' reluctance to engage with services that might bring them to the attention of immigration as the main reasons.[75] Angela worked as a registered nurse and contact tracer for the ASHS in the early 1990s. She remembered accompanying Debbie Hager, the then coordinator of NZPC Auckland, to parlours to invite Thai workers to the clinic. They developed trust with parlour managers, who brought workers to the clinic with the assurance that they would not be reported to immigration. Angela described the Thai women as 'entrepreneurs within their community', who sometimes stayed in the clinic for the afternoon, setting up food stalls and selling herbs and jewellery.

The focus on Thai workers arose in response to a reported 'dramatic' increase in Thai women entering the sex industry following an amendment to the Immigration Act in 1987. The amendment removed visa requirements for Thai, Malaysian, Singaporean and Indonesian passport holders travelling to New Zealand for up to three months. The visa waivers garnered criticism from the New Zealand Customs Service and the New Zealand Police, which alleged the anticipated influx of Thai visitors would lead to drug smuggling and money laundering.[76] Others have argued that the significant growth in Thai visitors did not occur until the mid-1990s.[77]

Alex worked alongside several Thai women at Adam & Eve Massage Parlour on K Road from the age of fourteen until she was eighteen. Adam & Eve was located in a strip of buildings with interconnecting doors – 'though it wasn't obvious unless you knew' – that also housed a rap parlour and the Pacific Sauna and Spa (under the same management), among other venues. She explained that, in the mid- to late 1980s:

> immigration was the main thing at that time. They would have a warning system for the girls, so all the bells would ring, or they had a silent system where the lights would go on. So, depending on what stairwell [officers] were coming up the girls could bail out any other number of ways. I mean,

> I've seen them jump out windows and run onto the roof and stuff. It was a big thing then. There was no protection for the worker who was here for whatever reason at all at that time. They were never mean or anything, but it was what it was. Girls were unprotected both ways, and deportation was instant.

On 28 June 1990, the New Zealand Police and the Immigration Service undertook a combined raid of several massage parlours and rap parlours in Auckland. Twelve Thai women had their visitor permits revoked, while, as one detective noted, a 'similar number eluded police, disappearing by what seemed to be a well-practised means of escape'.[78] Consequently, New Zealand Police and the Customs Department proposed the government reintroduce visa requirements.[79] While Immigration Minister Annette King initially supported the proposal in the hope that it would limit Thai women working in the industry, she faced opposition from those who felt the proposal would be damaging to tourism and business, and prejudicial to target one country.[80] The following month, Foreign Affairs and Trade Minister Mike Moore confirmed they would not reintroduce the visas.[81]

Government officials' focus on Thai women was located in wider concerns about the safety and autonomy of sex workers from Southeast Asia. Many of these women had been recruited from northern Thailand with the promise of earning large sums of money abroad. Recruiters paid women's airfares and other travel costs, with the agreement that women would work during their three-month stay to repay these costs and an additional agency fee of several thousand dollars.[82] Writing in a 1989 issue of *Siren*, one author denounced the recruiters as 'syndicates who are nothing more than pimps' who subsequently 'extort large sums of money from the women for merely flying them out to New Zealand'.[83] In 1991, the Ministry of Women's Affairs reported that Thai and Filipino women's insecure immigration statuses and dependence on predominantly male sponsors meant they were especially vulnerable to exploitation.[84] Health workers and the NZPC also raised concerns that agents withheld these women's passports and most of their earnings and expected them to work extensive hours in parlours to repay inflated debts.[85] They also noted that the pressure on Thai women to earn money over a short period – to repay debts and to support their families overseas – meant some might have felt compelled to accept pressure from clients to forgo the use of a condom.[86]

Concerns about the spread of HIV among – and by – Thai sex workers also emerged during this period. A 1995 article in *New Truth*, formerly *NZ Truth*, alleged 'Thai prostitutes could be spreading the deadly Aids virus here' by agreeing to unprotected sex with clients who 'then [go] home to a wife and kids'.[87] While the manager of one Auckland massage parlour claimed 'as long as they get paid they don't mind', they acknowledged that some clients tried to remove the condom without the woman's knowledge. As Chapter Four has outlined in greater depth, covert condom removal is now recognised as rape. The NZPC countered by arguing that Thai workers were extremely willing to engage in the NZPC's Thai education programme and condemned the men who put pressure on vulnerable people in a foreign country.[88]

Concerns about Thai sex workers' safety escalated across the late 1990s with allegations of trafficking. In April 1999, the British current affairs show *Dispatches* exposed three New Zealanders in Thailand as among the most prolific traffickers of Thai women.[89] The episode gained international attention and raised questions about the extent to which Thai women working in New Zealand massage parlours were there under duress. At that time, there was an estimated five hundred Thai women in Auckland parlours and a further hundred Thai sex workers across the rest of the country.[90] Two months later in June 1999, a twenty-five-year-old Thai woman shared her story of travelling to New Zealand with the promise of working in a restaurant. Instead, she and her two travel companions were forced to work in a parlour on Auckland's Fort Street to repay their $7000 contract before their three-month visitor visas expired.[91] The woman and her new partner – a New Zealand citizen who paid the parlour $1000 for her release and spoke to the *New Zealand Herald* on the condition of anonymity – argued the practice was rampant in New Zealand and was run by Thai nationals.[92]

That same month, Auckland mayor Christine Fletcher initiated meetings with a multi-agency group in response to their concerns that there could be up to fifty Thai women being forced to work in the city's massage parlours.[93] The meetings included representatives from the NZPC, Auckland District Police, the Human Rights Commission (HRC), New Zealand Immigration Service, the Shakti Asian women's support group, and End Child Prostitution and Trafficking (ECPAT) New Zealand (now Child ALERT), among others.[94] By the end of the year, the HRC and the Immigration Service had developed a 'safe escape' procedure for women who were in the industry against their will. Their strategy involved offering

people temporary accommodation in safe houses, airfares to their home countries, and fast-tracked travel documents for those whose passports had been confiscated.[95] The 'safe escape' procedure was the first part of a two-part plan. The second part focused on informing women of their rights and raising awareness in Thailand about the danger of accepting offers to work abroad.[96] They promoted the escape strategies on bright pink stickers, in Thai and English, that advised readers, 'If you want to escape – we can help you.'[97] Yet as Farida Sultana, the manager of Shakti, noted, many wanted to remain in New Zealand. The poverty they faced in Thailand, coupled with their feelings of shame at having been in the sex industry, meant '[s]ending them back home is no solution'.[98] Nevertheless, deportation appears to have continued to be a priority of New Zealand officials. In 2000, a bust in the east Auckland suburb of Pakuranga saw 'a house-full of Thai girls . . . tipped out and put on a plane.'[99]

Inquiries by the NZPC and the New Zealand Police indicated that the incidence of people forced into the industry was much rarer than the above reports suggested.[100] In 1992, Auckland police commissioner Brion Duncan and a Thai colleague spoke with Thai parlour workers on Fort Street, and 'felt assured that they were happy, well paid and looked after'.[101] By the end of the decade, Auckland police confirmed, 'No hard evidence has come to hand involving Thai sex workers being kept against their will as slaves.'[102] As Detective John McCarthy from the Asian Crime Unit pointed out, however, people's fear of authority and acknowledgement that they were working without a visa meant it was not surprising potential cases had not come to police attention.[103] In these instances, individuals' vulnerability was compounded by language barriers and fear of retaliation against themselves or their families.

The NZPC called for decriminalisation of sex work to eliminate the exploitation of Thai workers. Speaking in 1995, Catherine Healy argued that sex workers would not be exploited if they could work legally in New Zealand, and if they had the freedom to go to authorities with complaints without the fear of prosecution.[104] Concerns about trafficking emerged again among debates for decriminalisation in the early 2000s. They were the motivation behind the introduction of Section 19 of the Prostitution Reform Act 2003, which prohibits people from working while on temporary visas. It is a clause that the NZPC has been working to repeal for over twenty years.

Barriers to safe sex

The laws that criminalised soliciting and brothel-keeping posed serious barriers to the NZPC's HIV-prevention efforts. In the early 1990s, reports started to emerge about police officers who confiscated condoms (both used and unused) as evidence of sex work-related offences.[105] The irony that two government departments, the Department of Health (which funded the NZPC) and the New Zealand Police, were 'sending completely opposite signals' was lost on few.[106] In November 1991, the NZPC threatened to withdraw from its contract with the Department of Health after police arrested four parlour workers during raids in Wellington. Writing to Associate Minister of Health Katherine O'Regan, Catherine Healy and criminologist Jan Jordan successfully called for an interdepartmental review into how the law 'perpetuates discrimination against sex workers to the extent that it actively obstructs the promotion of safer sex practices and the prevention of HIV/AIDS'.[107] They argued that the NZPC faced a moral dilemma by asking sex workers to be open about their sexual practices and to practise safe sex when doing so exposed them to arrest and prosecution.[108]

This practice of police confiscating condoms as evidence of sex work was part of an international trend. From 1986, the English Collective of Prostitutes campaigned against what it deemed the 'criminalisation of "safer sex"'. It argued that the police's seizure of condoms contradicted government policies to enforce safe sex and undermined the collective efforts of women, health authorities, and HIV and AIDS organisations who had worked tirelessly to prevent the spread of the virus.[109] In August 1987, the San Francisco Police Department issued a special order for officers to cease confiscating condoms to use as evidence for soliciting offences.[110] Nevertheless, police in San Francisco reportedly continued to harass sex workers by piercing holes in their condoms in acts of intimidation that rendered them unusable.[111]

New Zealand police officers continued to seize condoms as evidence of sex work during their raids on massage parlours across the 1990s. In January 1993, police reportedly removed condoms from some venues in Auckland.[112] The following month, a series of police raids in downtown Auckland – known as Operation Apache – resulted in nearly fifty women being arrested on soliciting charges.[113] An additional seventy Thai women were questioned by immigration and faced deportation.[114] In a move counter to the safe sex messages, these raids included police confiscating workers'

condoms as evidence of sex work. While the commander of Auckland Police reported they had returned the condoms and stated, 'We don't want to do anything that might endanger or cause the increase in the spread of AIDS,' the damage was already done.[115] These raids were in addition to instances when police had included individual workers' possession of condoms in their summary of evidence.[116]

The confiscation of condoms threatened the relationship between the NZPC and parlour managers and employees, the latter of whom were understandably concerned about having condoms on the premises. As Anna Reed explained:

> We wanted businesses to stock condoms and lube but they were scared to because every so often there would be a bust of a parlour and anything that could be used as evidence that sex was happening on-site would be seized by the police. And largely because of that we kept saying, 'This is too hard.' I mean, 'You've gotta make it easier.' Here we are being funded by the Health Department to do a certain job, and then the same things are being used as prosecution by the Police Department. You know, 'Get your act together.'

In 1993, Deputy Commissioner Peter Doone released a statement in *Ten One*, the New Zealand Police magazine. He outlined the force's competing duties to 'investigate prostitution, brothel-keeping and allied offences when local priorities allow' while supporting the Department of Health's safe sex programme, which involved distributing condoms, lubricants and other safe sex material to sex workers. Doone's statement indicates a shift away from actively prosecuting sex workers. He instructed police 'not to seize or use photographs of such materials as evidence of soliciting or prostitution' and reasoned that they could usually find other evidence for prosecution '*if warranted*'.[117]

Laws that criminalised brothel-keeping made it difficult for parlour managers to promote safe sex within their establishments, especially considering they had to operate under the guise that they did not know sex occurred on the premises. In 1996, *Siren* published a three-page spread titled 'What to Tell New Workers'.[118] The article was produced by a parlour receptionist, who stated they could legally only tell new workers the hours of business, the dress code, how to conduct themselves in the lounge, their

cleaning duties, and that they were expected to take their clothes off and massage clients. They acknowledged that some managers advised new workers on negotiating condom use with clients, and directed them to the NZPC, Family Planning, and sexual health clinics. Yet, 'when they do so they risk their livelihood and that of the business, as well as a conviction'.[119] The author placed the onus on more experienced workers, whom they argued can 'do a lot' to inform and support new workers. They argued that, unlike management, other masseuses could not be charged with procuring, 'as when they impart information they do not do it for gain or reward'.[120] Jody Hanson, a former lecturer in adult education and vice-editor of *Between the Sheets Quarterly*, highlights the informal training of sex workers as a 'generally unrecognised' part of the New Zealand sex industry, whereby experienced sex workers advised beginners about lubricants, condom brands, and ways to present themselves to clients.[121]

The risk of being charged with brothel-keeping, which was punishable by a fine and up to five years' imprisonment, was a serious concern, but it was not the only impediment to parlour managers encouraging safe sex within their establishments. Some interviewees remembered managers who actively discouraged them from using condoms, which they felt was based on concerns about losing business. One interviewee, Allie, recalled being advised by the manager at her first massage parlour in 2000 that 'this guy likes to have his condom on and off a little bit, but you won't get anything'. Notwithstanding the practical difficulties of having a condom partially on and off, such nonchalance undermined the sexual health messages that had been in place for well over a decade.

Another interviewee, Gina, also described being discouraged from using condoms for particular sex acts with regular clients. When asked if she used condoms for oral sex when she started working in the early 1990s, she responded:

> No, not always. No, no, not back then. We didn't know. No. In fact, at one parlour we were encouraged not to use condoms for oral sex. And this was all before the law changed. But there were regulars where I never used to use condoms for oral sex. It was just coming into that era where we were just starting to use condoms for oral. So, there were times when I didn't, no. I was very lucky I guess.

Fellatio was initially a 'grey area'.[122] In 1985, the NZAF released its pamphlet 'AIDS: New Rules for Safe Sex', which listed oral sex as either 'unsafe' or 'potentially unsafe' depending on whether the receiver ejaculated.[123] Safe sex messages that followed encouraged people to use condoms for all sex acts that could involve the exchange of bodily fluids. This included an October 1986 pamphlet from the Auckland Stop AIDS Group, which operated under the auspices of the NZAF Trust Board, advising people to use condoms for *all* sex acts.[124] As Gina's testimony highlights, however, some uncertainty about the universal importance of condoms prevailed.

Even after the threat of arrest was removed with decriminalisation, some managers continued to refrain from advising their employees about using condoms. This was most clear in Dani's testimony. As outlined in the introduction to this book, Dani joined a brothel at the age of thirty-one in 2004. She worked in several brothels in Auckland and Australia over the next five years and then established herself as an independent escort in 2009. She reflected on having a 'rose-tinted view' of the industry and enjoying a 'very, very lucrative' career. Her single complaint was the lack of advice she received when she started working. When questioned about the guidance her employers provided, she promptly stated:

> Zero. Zero. So, from an HR perspective, the first thing I wanted to do when I got into the industry was create an orientation book [laughs]. I think that there should be a folder given to everybody who has an orientation process because that's what happens when you start a new job. I still haven't done this. But no. I didn't get any instruction from anybody.

The lack of guidance posed a potential threat to her health, as she explained:

> I didn't realise condoms were something that you used when you did oral, I had no clue about that. So, I remember within the first few days doing a job with another girl and I went to perform oral without a condom and she stopped me, and she said, 'What are you *doing*?' And I was like, 'What do you mean?' She goes, 'Put a condom on that.' I was like, 'What? Okay.' So that's the level of naïvete when you enter the

> industry without any indication. You know, you don't get the orientation book that says, 'This is what you do.' Of course, now it's completely logical, but back then it wasn't something that I did in my own relationships. So that's the kind of thing I think is really important. Girls who are starting in this need to know every aspect of safety and protection. And if I could do that time over, I would definitely have changed some of that.

The parlours' lack of guidance on the use of condoms for oral sex was especially concerning considering business operators were legally required to 'take all reasonable steps to give health information (whether oral or written) to sex workers and clients' under the Prostitution Reform Act. The Act also mandated workers and clients use condoms 'or other appropriate barrier' for vaginal, anal and oral sex. Further, in June 2004, the Occupational Safety and Health Service published a set of guidelines that reinforced sex workers' rights to safety and protection.[125] The guidelines closely reflected those developed by the Australian sex workers' rights organisation Scarlet Alliance and the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations. They were adapted for the New Zealand context in consultation with the NZPC.[126] The guidelines emphasised employers' responsibilities to have information on safe sex requirements 'prominently displayed', and to provide condoms and advice on preventing condom breakage and slippage.[127]

Since the early 1990s, the NZPC has produced and distributed the orientation information Dani had hoped to receive when she entered the industry. In 1990, it released a twelve-page booklet titled 'Your First Client: Information Pack'. Subsequent 'new worker packs' that included information on the industry and sample safe sex supplies have since followed.[128] Yet when Dani entered the industry in 2004, she was not in contact with the NZPC and *Siren* had been discontinued.

New Zealand sex workers' responses to HIV and AIDS are located in a longer history of sex workers taking charge of their sexual health by undergoing health checks and insisting on the use of condoms. The significance of their actions extends well beyond their achievements in protecting their health and that of their peers. On a wider level, sex workers' collective efforts illustrate how they rejected stereotypes – fuelled by the mainstream press – that depicted sex workers and other members of identified risk groups as posing a threat to the general population. This took place against a backdrop wherein the government promptly provided

funding to the newly established NZPC as part of a national response to the threat of HIV and AIDS while soliciting, brothel-keeping and living off the earnings of sex work were outlawed across the country. At the same time, public prejudices prevailed, and would continue to do so even after decriminalisation. The crisis shone a light on New Zealand's long-held and enduring prejudices and on the functional hypocrisy of the law, both of which impeded safe sex efforts. Importantly, it was the on-the-ground relationships within these communities, and within the gay rights community (which faced similar prejudices around the spread of the virus), that encouraged an effective response to the epidemic. While the outbreak of HIV and AIDS provided the impetus for the formation of the NZPC, the Collective established a broader remit in the years following. The following chapter examines the NZPC's actions in challenging the prejudice attached to sex work and making the industry safer by fighting for full decriminalisation.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Fighting for Decriminalisation

On the evening of 25 June 2003, Catherine Healy and activists on both sides of the decriminalisation campaign filed into the public gallery at Parliament House in Wellington to witness the final vote on the Prostitution Reform Bill. Emotions were running high. The Bill had been pulled out of Parliament's customary biscuit tin as Labour MP Tim Barnett's member's bill nearly three years prior, in October 2000.[1] It had survived fierce opposition with multiple amendments and over four hundred hours of recorded debate in the Justice and Electoral Committee and the Chamber. For Catherine, the prospect of it being defeated at the final stage was unthinkable. She had spent the past sixteen years advocating for legislative reform that would decriminalise sex work and protect the rights of those working in the industry. The Bill 'had to go through. I had not prepared myself for a loss, at all. I just hadn't allowed that kind of thinking.' Despite her determination, she was conscious that several MPs were wavering in their support: 'We'd won all the way through, all the way through. But certainly, we'd been chipped at quite effectively by the opposition on the scare tactics.' Catherine and her colleagues held hands. Some silently prayed. After a tense ten-minute wait, the Speaker of the House announced the results: sixty ayes, fifty-nine noes, and one abstention. The Prostitution Reform Bill was passed into law.

The passage of the Prostitution Reform Bill was a watershed moment in histories of sex workers' rights. It repealed laws that prohibited soliciting,

brothel-keeping and living off the earnings of sex work, and made New Zealand the first country in the world to do so. There is a body of scholarship that traces how the NZPC, under the leadership of founding national coordinator and spokesperson Catherine Healy, garnered support for decriminalisation from its inception in the late 1980s.[2] This included publicly advocating for law reform at the first National Council on AIDS Conference in May 1989.[3] Some of those on the front lines of the campaign have traced the Bill's 'long journey through parliament' in academic publications.[4] They emphasise the significance of New Zealand's mixed-member proportional electoral system, which resulted in a greater diversity of people and parties represented in Parliament, in creating an environment where such progressive legislative change was possible.[5] Less scholarly emphasis has been placed on the personal contributions sex worker activists and allies put into advocating for law reform over nearly two decades.

This chapter recasts narratives of decriminalisation – which primarily focus on politicians' and some activists' public actions – to focus on narrators' intimate memories of campaigning for law reform. These included disclosing experiences of sexual violence, sometimes for the first time, to individual MPs who had the power to vote on a law that would transform the lives of those working in the industry. It examines how the campaigners gathered support for decriminalisation across the 1990s and engages with narrators' memories of challenging abolitionist groups' graphic and highly publicised allegations of exploitation in the industry. It relates, too, individuals' experiences with police and the public in the immediate aftermath of decriminalisation. In examining these issues, this chapter sheds light on the significant unpaid and often unseen labour the individuals directly responsible for New Zealand's pioneering sex work legislation dedicated to transforming the industry.

Building momentum for decriminalisation

In July 1989, Catherine Healy and two other NZPC volunteers introduced their case for decriminalisation to Parliament in their written and oral submissions to the Select Committee on Justice and Law Reform. The Select Committee had arisen in response to proposed amendments to the Crimes Bill that would have extended anti-soliciting laws and penalised private escorts. With activist Bill Logan – who had publicly campaigned for homosexual law reform and was instrumental in establishing HIV and AIDS prevention and support in Wellington – they produced a submission,

which, Catherine reflected, 'still today is a very strong piece'. The submission outlined the urgency of 'adjusting the legislation to make it consistent with sound principle' amidst the global health crisis that was the HIV and AIDS epidemic.[6] It argued that the law not only forced many sex workers to hide their occupations, 'thereby making them inaccessible to organisation and education', but also meant other sex workers and parlour managers were cautious of carrying condoms and associating with the NZPC. Such actions, they feared, 'may add to a pattern of evidence to obtain a prosecution' for sex work-related crimes.[7] Consequently, 'If AIDS is to be kept out of the sex industry, the sex industry must be brought out of hiding.'[8]

In September 1989, the *Evening Post* published a letter from Labour MP Trevor de Cleene, which is credited as the 'first example of collaboration between sex workers, politicians and the media in explaining the consequences of the existing legislation and the need for reform'.[9] De Cleene had served on the aforementioned Select Committee, and his letter heavily reflected the issues the NZPC had raised in its written submission. He argued that the outbreak of HIV and AIDS 'must cause us all to rethink our prejudices', and that decriminalisation was essential to protecting the health of workers and clients.[10] The NZPC continued to remind MPs about how the law impeded its HIV and AIDS prevention initiatives. In November 1991, the NZPC successfully called for an interdepartmental review of the law by threatening to refuse government funding and withdraw from its contract with the Department of Health. After meeting with the NZPC in 1991, National MP Hon. Maurice Williamson became the 'first [politician] to speak out frequently and passionately about the injustice of the laws'.[11] He was soon joined by his colleague and fellow associate minister of health, National MP Hon. Katherine O'Regan.

The following year, in March 1992, Williamson announced that the government would consider decriminalising soliciting to support HIV and AIDS education.[12] He had noted brothels' open displays of safe sex pamphlets, posters and condoms in Victoria and New South Wales, where brothels had been legalised since 1984 and 1988 respectively (full decriminalisation in New South Wales came in 1995).[13] Such openness was not possible in New Zealand parlours and could be seen as an admission that sex occurred on the premises.[14] Williamson was also reportedly influenced by the Ministry of Women's Affairs' background paper on sex work, which had been released in May 1991. The paper attributed the 'sex industry [being] virtually free of HIV' to sex workers' knowledge of transmission and prevention, despite

their efforts being 'hindered by the existing legislation'.[15] It identified 'decriminalisation with controls' as a preferable policy option, which would repeal some anti-soliciting laws while retaining other restrictions.[16] In a similar vein, the law changes that Williamson proposed focused solely on soliciting. As the NZPC noted, they were certainly 'not the full-scale review of the law on prostitution that is necessary'. Nevertheless, they conceded that it was 'a first step'.[17]

Other politicians soon followed suit and expressed their support for decriminalisation to aid safe sex education. In 1993, Labour's spokesperson for women's affairs, Sonja Davies, credited sex workers for the industry being 'virtually HIV free'.[18] She praised sex workers who mobilised and educated themselves about HIV prevention, despite 'over-zealous police' who arrested people for carrying condoms or for displaying safe sex literature, and called for a review of the 'archaic soliciting laws'.[19] The following year, Labour MP Lianne Dalziel also expressed her support for decriminalisation. Speaking at the opening of the Christchurch NZPC drop-in centre in early 1994, she questioned how safe sex messages could be shared in parlours when the mere existence of parlours intimated that illegal activity was occurring.[20] In 1994, Catherine Healy became part of a campaign team that included National MP Katherine O'Regan and representatives from selected Christian and women's organisations, including the YWCA.[21] They began working with lawyers, academics and others to draft the first version of the Prostitution Reform Bill.[22]

From the outset, the NZPC was wary of any changes to the law that could potentially worsen the situation for workers. NZPC representatives who attended Australia's first National Sex Industry Conference in Melbourne in late October 1988 were made aware of 'several undesirable consequences' of legalisation, whereby authorities effectively set the terms of trade, retaining the option for criminal charges against those who breach said terms. The Prostitutes Collective of Victoria had organised the conference with the theme the 'AIDS debate', and received financial support from the Commonwealth Government AIDS Programme.[23] The state of Victoria had legalised sex work with the Prostitution Regulation Act 1986. As NZPC ally Jan Jordan (who wrote extensively in favour of law reform in academic and media articles) reported, the law change in Victoria had created a 'two-tiered system'. Legalisation had enabled a minority of people to work in registered massage parlours, with managers taking a significant portion of their earnings and being liable for exorbitant registration fees, while the majority

were forced to work in 'situations characterised by exploitation and violence, often facing strong pressures or even coercion to participate in unsafe sexual practices'.[24] The NZPC concluded that 'legalisation of prostitution was not considered a safe option'.[25] On the contrary, decriminalisation would remove criminal charges for specific activities.

The editors of *Siren* sustained their commitment to decriminalisation, rather than legalisation, into the 1990s. The February 1993 issue opened with an editorial on recent police raids in Auckland and Christchurch, which meant 'our attention was once again forced to focus on the inappropriate laws that govern our industry'. The editors expressed solidarity with workers and managers who were awaiting criminal charges, and declared that 'the law is an ass, and deserves to be brayed at'. They also voiced their opposition to legalisation, which 'would result in an extremely dangerous outcome' with 'state endorsed pimps [who] would negotiate on a worker's behalf for sex with a client'. This system would also undermine individuals' rights to refuse sex, considering the client had prepaid for the service.[26] New Zealand activists were certainly not alone in their opposition to legalisation. The English Collective of Prostitutes argued that legalisation 'institutionalises state pimping and institutionalises women on the game'.[27]

Discussions about decriminalisation to protect workers' safety escalated in the mid-1990s after a series of horrific attacks on sex industry workers. The brutal murder of twenty-one-year-old Aucklander Natacha Hogan off Karangahape Road in October 1996 gained nationwide attention. Nine days later, the same perpetrator murdered sex worker Ladda Nimphet and parlour manager Herbert Morris, and attempted to murder their colleague Angkhana Chaisamret at Cleopatra's Massage and Escort Lounge in Fort Street.[28] He handed himself in to the police shortly afterwards. These attacks occurred not long after the high-profile disappearances of twenty-year-old Leah Stephens and seventeen-year-old Jane Furlong from K Road in August 1989 and May 1993 respectively.[29] Workers in Auckland were understandably shaken by these crimes, which also 'sent a ripple of fear' through their colleagues in Christchurch, who reported feeling scared and vulnerable.[30] They had reason to be concerned. In November 1996, Christchurch police reported they were searching for two violent offenders who had posed as clients and sexually assaulted three women in as many weeks. Police and the NZPC circulated a photograph of one of the offenders. Yet the criminal status of sex work, coupled with individuals' fears of retaliation from the rapists, made people reluctant to report these crimes to the police.[31]

In the wake of the murders, the NZPC condemned the 'out-of-date and entirely inappropriate' laws that criminalised sex workers.[32] NZPC regional coordinators in Auckland and Christchurch argued that the recent murders and assaults in these cities highlighted the need for decriminalisation to create safer working conditions.[33] They reasoned that sex workers would feel more comfortable reporting dangerous incidents to the police if the law were changed.[34] Hogan's family also publicly supported the law change.[35] Yet others had the opposite reaction. That same month, October 1996, Auckland mayor Les Mills called for a 'crackdown' on sex workers in the city to eliminate the industry.[36] He found little support among his colleagues, who rejected his 'unrealistic' and 'naïve' proposal. They countered that such punitive measures would simply drive the industry underground and put sex workers in even greater danger.[37]

By the end of 1996, the NZPC had gained support from 'surprising' sources in its campaign for decriminalisation.[38] This included the Young Women's Christian Association. In November 1996, the national executive director, Marion Wood, published an open letter affirming how the 'recent tragic attacks on sex workers in Auckland make it all the more urgent to review and revise our laws on prostitution'. Addressing criticisms that it was contradictory for a Christian organisation to support decriminalisation, she highlighted how the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the National Council of Women had prioritised fighting to repeal contagious diseases legislation in the nineteenth century. She emphasised that the YWCA's support for decriminalisation aligned with, rather than undermined, its history and values as a Christian organisation. It illustrated a 'willing[ness] to challenge sexism and double standards which lead to prosecution of prostitutes, but not of their clients'. She concluded: 'The fight for justice which began with the Contagious Diseases Act is still, after more than a century, not over.'[39]

Other, perhaps unexpected, supporters included the 'traditionally conservative' National Council of Women, the Federation of Business and Professional Women, the Young Nationals – who called for decriminalisation to promote safe sex education – and a judge who reportedly 'gave two Wellington brothel-keepers a relatively light sentence because in his view, society had become more accepting of the profession'.[40] Further, while the National Catholic Women's League wanted soliciting laws extended to criminalise clients, the Catholic feminist women's group Sophia supported decriminalisation to better protect workers.[41]

As momentum for law reform grew through the 1990s, it aroused significant debate among sex workers and massage parlour owners. They were especially wary of supporting any law changes that might inadvertently attract unwanted attention from the police or other authorities. In June 1992, the editors of *Siren,* many of whom were involved in campaigning for law reform, expressed frustration that a 'small group of sex industry workers want to preserve the status quo regarding decriminalisation of soliciting'. They argued that these workers believed they could continue to evade arrest 'because they are discreet'. They cautioned readers that 'the law makes no such discrimination'.[42]

Writing in the July 1996 issue of *Siren*, one worker who had 'always felt pretty indifferent' to decriminalisation had 'gotten right down off the fence' after having the 'painful and humiliating, but above all unjust' experience of being arrested for soliciting. They condemned the law as a 'terminally ill piece of legislation' devised to 'catch some real or mythical Mr. Big' and urged others to write letters in support of decriminalisation.[43] In the same issue, another contributor shared a letter they planned to send to their MP in defence of a Wellington couple who had been convicted for brothel-keeping. It was, they wrote, 'outrageous to think that a couple are going to lose their freedom for a crime that had no complainants and no victims'.[44]

Nevertheless, some resistance to law reform prevailed within the industry. In April 1998, the editors of *Siren* reported that some workers opposed decriminalisation as they felt they would be required to pay tax. They concluded, 'These people are clearly misinformed.'[45] As outlined in Chapter Five, people were already required to declare income from sex work: *Siren* argued that workers' refusal to pay tax put them at risk of prosecution not only for soliciting, brothel-keeping, procuring for sex work and living on the earnings of sex work, but also for failing to declare income.[46] Additionally, the government could potentially seize their earnings and assets under the Proceeds of Crime Act 1991 if they were prosecuted for brothel-keeping or living off the earnings of sex work.[47]

The campaign for decriminalisation gained serious momentum in 1997 with the establishment of a working group for law reform under the National government.[48] In April 1998, the *New Zealand Herald Weekend Magazine* reported that MP Katherine O'Regan had sponsored a member's bill – entitled A Prostitution Reform – with the support of the NZPC and the YWCA. Her new bill aimed to repeal laws that criminalised soliciting

and living off the earnings of sex work, and which required massage parlours to carry licences. In doing so, she hoped it would 'safeguard the welfare and occupational safety of sex workers'.[49] Yet her bill did not make it to Parliament. Shortly afterwards, O'Regan informed disappointed campaigners that she was planning to resign from Parliament and could no longer sponsor the Bill. It was therefore Tim Barnett, the Labour MP for Christchurch Central, who finally introduced the Bill to Parliament on 21 September 2000. Barnett's prior engagement with Catherine Healy and Anna Reed through the NZAF, coupled with his electorate having the 'largest concentration of brothels and street-based sex workers outside central Auckland', meant he had 'political reason and justification to be engaged in the debate'.[50] Yet he faced criticism from abolitionists for being an openly gay man speaking on what they perceived as women's issues.

The rise of the opposition

A key part of the campaign for decriminalisation involved countering highly publicised allegations of exploitation made by groups opposed to sex work. Catherine Healy remembered her initial hopes for decriminalisation:

> I think [it was] when I met Maurice Williamson, who was the associate minister of health – that would've been about '91 – and we were in the heart of police raids and real problems with condoms being presented as evidence and just this feeling that something had to give. From that moment on, I knew we would get decriminalisation. I knew it. I knew we would. We would have to. I knew that. I didn't know that it would take sixteen long years. But I did know that we would get it. I just felt that we would get it and that I'd be on it to make sure that happened.

Catherine's testimony reflects the dire situation sex workers faced in the early 1990s with police operations that targeted the sex industry. The situation on the ground was far removed from one superintendent's allegations that 'crackdowns' were uncommon in Auckland and only took place in response to complaints from local business owners.[51] Indeed, on the evening of 30 April 1992, police in Christchurch posed as clients and arrested street-based workers and escorts as part of Operation Redlight.[52] The NZPC

condemned the police actions as entrapment, a 'misuse of the law', and the kind of activity that 'drives prostitution underground to the extent that safe sex education becomes almost impossible'.[53] The following year, in January 1993, police raided a dozen massage parlours as part of a combined police and immigration crackdown in downtown Auckland, known as Operation Apache. Forty police officers and nine immigration officials participated in the raids, which resulted in over forty-five women being charged with soliciting, some of whom had their condoms confiscated by police, and a further seventy Thai women being interrogated about their immigration status.[54] Further, in December 1994, police in Dunedin concluded their four-month undercover investigation, Operation Maid, by raiding and closing three of the city's five massage parlours and a strip club. Detective Senior Sergeant Peter Gibbons reportedly stated they 'targeted the principals rather than the persons who work in the establishments' and wanted 'to send a message to people in the industry – both as employers and employees – that they must operate within the boundaries set and that the police won't turn a blind eye to activities which fall outside the boundaries'.[55]

These police operations continued into the late 1990s. In July 1998, police launched Operation Clean Street A to remove street-based sex workers from the Ōtāhuhu shopping centre. The operation reportedly arose in response to complaints from the Otahuhu Business Association about the increasing number of sex workers in the area. Indeed, the *Manukau Daily News* suggested the suburb could be 'Auckland's second biggest red light district', although NZPC Auckland refuted such claims. The operation resulted in eight people being arrested in the first three weeks.[56]

Catherine's initial confidence that they would achieve decriminalisation also reflects the public's support for law reform in the early 1990s. She explained:

> The public opinion was definitely on our side, public editorials, there wasn't any credible opposition, there was no opposition for a long time. There was nobody speaking out and coming up with why it shouldn't be decriminalised, not publicly, and even privately I didn't run into it. So, I had a sense that really the time was there and that it felt all right.

Opponents to law reform soon emerged. These included Minister of Internal Affairs Graeme Lee, who was 'one of the most morally con-

servative MPs in the Government'.[57] In early 1992, Lee anticipated that decriminalisation would result in 'a huge increase in sexual activity which must logically lead to an increase in AIDS', and declared that groups advocating for decriminalisation to prevent the spread of AIDS 'deserve to be sacked'.[58] Lee had used similar arguments to lobby against homosexual law reform the previous decade.[59] The NZPC discredited Lee as knowing little about sex, sex work, or HIV and AIDS, and as one who 'probably thinks condoms are for filling with water and throwing at schoolteachers'. Yet they were conscious of his connections to a potentially 'very powerful, and very dangerous' lobby group.[60] It was not long before they became aware of the power of the opposition.

Several narrators in this book remembered those opposed to decriminalisation as well resourced and well connected to international abolitionist groups. The Maxim Institute, a conservative think tank established in 2001, was a particularly vocal opponent of law reform. Its strategy included commissioning a billboard near Wellington Airport that alleged decriminalisation would lead to 'more child prostitution'.[61] Catherine remembered:

> They started coming out with these media statements saying things like the numbers of prostitutes would increase, the numbers of brothels would increase, that there would be more children, more brothels, more prostitutes, more crime, more violence, more gangs. All those easy-to-pluck scenarios with no credible evidence, but very powerful because they could just put a 'more' in front of anything. So, we would just counter and say, 'More rights, more ability to report crime, more chance to stand up, and Maxim's telling more lies'.

Catherine recalled a particularly graphic suggestion one opponent put forward that depicted women in the sex industry being assaulted with mobile phones. She explained:

> We found that kind of argument where people who were opposed to the Bill would describe the most horrible, horrific situations in graphic details like that really concerning, really horrible. Sort of like they were doing it themselves. It was a verbal assault on sex workers using a kind of pornography

> to ram home how much they were opposed to the idea of sex workers. It was layers on top of each other, how could someone with strong pro-women attitudes, someone like [Auckland feminist] Sandra Coney, then use such a graphic way of describing the problems associated with sex workers by almost assaulting them with this kind of image?

Catherine emphasised that the situations opponents described were not representative of sex work. Rather, 'anyone can describe horrific scenes and put them into any context anywhere, any workforce, any relationship'.[62]

In 2003, the Maxim Institute commissioned American clinical psychologist Dr Melissa Farley, a fierce opponent of sex work as a form of violence against women, to conduct research in New Zealand.[63] Georgina Beyer remembered being alarmed, and initially convinced, by the statistics Farley presented. Speaking in an interview with Gareth Watkins for PrideNZ in 2013, she explained:

> She came to visit me at one point and put up some quite compelling arguments and debate which gave me pause to think about my support for the Bill. . . . I can't remember the details of what she told me, but she'd thrown some figures in my face and I was sort of taken aback by them. And you know, a reputable doctor and so on and so forth. And so, I took her at her word.

Farley's statistics perhaps carried particular weight given, as Beyer explained, the 'very little factual data on how the sex industry was operating in New Zealand' at that time. Criminologists have argued that the stigma that limits disclosure, the threat of arrest before 2003, and the 'transitory and often part-time nature of many workers' involvement' means it is particularly difficult to estimate the number of sex workers.[64]

Other researchers, including one who worked with Farley in New Zealand in 2003, have accused her of deceiving groups who facilitated her research, misrepresenting her findings on multiple occasions, and 'repeating unsubstantiated rumour as fact'.[65] Such rumours included the allegation that the number of street-based sex workers increased by 200–400 per cent after decriminalisation in 2003.[66] Several other opponents of decriminalisation have cited similar statistics, which, as the Prostitution Law Review Committee

argues, 'demonstrat[es] the ease with which opinion can be perceived as "fact"'.[67] These individuals included Teremoananuiakiwa Strickland Tahere, also known as Mama Tere Strickland (1963–2012). Mama Tere was a prominent trans activist and former sex worker who founded the support organisation Te Aronga Hou Inaianei (TAHI) to support trans sex workers in South Auckland.[68] She vehemently opposed decriminalisation and argued it would lead to an increase in young people, especially young Māori and Pacific individuals, entering the industry.[69] Nevertheless, multiple studies have concluded that, despite media reports to the contrary, decriminalisation has not affected the number of sex workers.[70]

Annah was actively involved in campaigning for decriminalisation in the early 2000s as a community liaison officer for NZPC Auckland. Annah had grown up with 'strong Christian values and strong activist values' and was well attuned to the importance of advocating for others by the time she joined the NZPC as a volunteer in the late 1990s. Her father came to New Zealand from Fiji on a work visa in 1963, and eventually managed to secure residency for her mother and elder siblings in 1972. Annah was born two years later. Her family initially rented an eight-room villa in Onehunga. They later purchased a three-bedroom property in the same suburb in 1978. Annah's parents 'always took in people who were hitchhiking, people who were homeless, people who were on temporary visas, taking in anybody. It was a house that always was open to people who didn't have families and were struggling.' Consequently, 'I guess I grew up with social justice in our home, that was around having that awareness around discrimination, immigration, and workers' rights from a migrant lens.' Annah was particularly alarmed by stories she had heard of family friends who were deported during the infamous Dawn Raids of 1974–76, where police raided homes and arrested people from the Pacific Islands whom they believed to have breached their visa conditions. Pacific studies scholar Melani Anae has characterised 'New Zealand's social and political climate during the early 1970s [as] one of racial tension and unrest'.[71] During this period, 'Racism was lawful, state-sanctioned and enshrined in acts of Parliament; Samoan and Tongan communities were targeted by police for incarceration and deportation under the rhetoric of "overstayer"'.[72] Annah's reference to the Dawn Raids early in the interview signalled the theme of fighting against racism that emerged throughout the rest of her testimony.

Annah remembered one particularly intense public debate in Helensville between NZPC Auckland coordinator Kate Dickie and Green

MP Sue Bradford speaking in favour of decriminalisation, and opponents Sandra Coney and conservative MP Larry Baldock from United Future New Zealand. United Future's success in the New Zealand general election of July 2002 was a major barrier to the Prostitution Reform Bill.[73] The party won eight seats, seven more than it had secured in the previous election, and was selected to form an alliance with Labour. Baldock and his colleagues vehemently opposed law reform. At one point, they unsuccessfully argued that the 'issues at stake were of such a level of constitutional importance that they should be put to a referendum'.[74]

During the debate in Helensville, Baldock and Coney spoke in favour of the Swedish model. This model – also known as the Nordic model after similar laws were subsequently passed in Norway, Iceland and other European countries – was based on Sweden's Sex Purchase Act 1999 and criminalised clients and third parties by prohibiting the purchase of sex.[75] Criminologists Tracey Sagar and Debbie Jones describe the Swedish model as being 'underpinned by a neo-abolitionist perspective that defined "prostitution" as male violence against women and the epitome of male patriarchal domination'.[76] Sex worker rights groups have criticised the Swedish model not only for overlooking the gender diversity of sex workers and their clients by positioning sex workers exclusively as disempowered cisgender women at the mercy of men, but also for increasing stigma against sex workers, and causing harm by making it harder for sex workers to screen clients.[77] Annah remembered the intensity of the debate:

> I didn't know that we were going into this freaking redneck area, so part of our strategy was that we weren't going to be loud and say stuff. So, we did these placards which said, 'My Body, My Choice'. And part of it was to throw back the campaign to Sandra Coney, you know all the history. And so, we had placards saying, 'My Body, My Choice. Decriminalise Sex Work'. But we went on a silent march in that hall of freaking right-wing Christians. It was like – I'm trying to imagine being in a witch hunt, that was the energy in there. Like *heckling*. They were heckling against our group.

The slogan 'my body, my choice' had been at the centre of campaigns for women's abortion rights since the early 1970s. Coney is well recognised for her work in this area, arguing for 'the right of a woman to do as she wishes

with her own body' and her role as one of the founding counsellors at the Auckland Medical Aid Centre, New Zealand's first abortion clinic, which opened in Remuera in May 1974.[78] Some radical feminists' perceptions of sex work as a form of violence against women emerged most prominently during the feminist sex wars of the 1980s and will be discussed in the following chapter. While Coney and others framed their opposition to decriminalisation as part of their fight for women's rights, others have denounced this stance as contradictory. Sue Bradford deemed it 'ironic' that 'someone who has spent her life defending the rights of women can turn round and say that we should be opposing a bill that will stop the criminalising and arresting of women on the streets of Auckland, many of whom are Māori women'.[79]

Advocating behind closed doors

From the late 1980s, activists featured in current affairs programmes, radio interviews and newspaper reports, where they advocated for decriminalisation to protect workers from exploitation and to support their safe sex campaigns. Less emphasis has been placed on the unseen parts of the campaign. The private meetings that took place between individual sex workers and MPs in the lead-up to the final vote in Parliament were material to the success of the passage of the Prostitution Reform Bill.

An important part of Annah's work involved meeting with MPs in Wellington to advocate for decriminalisation. She attested to the value of the skills she had developed as a massage parlour worker in her work with politicians:

> Because you're always meeting with politicians or dealing with sex workers and their issues and gathering stories and attending meetings, talking to different groups, publicly speaking out, talking to the media, coming out about why decriminalisation is really important, it becomes a campaign. It is a campaign. And when you're part of a sex worker rights' movement who has never been taught this in school you learn on the ropes. It's really, you just have to get on with it. The skills that you use in sex work when you have to clean up your room after the client leaves and clean up the shower, all that stuff you transfer into this work. And even to the

> point when the client comes into the lounge and then you all walk out there and you go, 'Hi darling, blah blah blah, this is me, blah blah blah', and within three to five minutes you've got your sales pitch, and he's gonna book you. Those are the skills that you transfer into lobbying. I guess some people won't understand that. You understand that when you've done sex work because it's a crucial part of making a sale but also connecting with someone and ensuring that they believe you, that what you're selling is real. And what we were selling was real. We're dealing with hundreds of sex workers' lives.

This was an intensely emotional and lengthy process, and it wasn't over until it was over – 'we were still in Wellington and still lobbying politicians in Parliament up to the eleventh hour, sharing these stories'.

Raw emotions surfaced often as Annah and her peers shared stories of facing exploitation and police brutality, and enduring the 'racism that exists in the sex industry when you're brown or you're Asian and you go and work in a white club'. They needed to convey the severity of their situations to people who had the power to improve sex workers' rights and autonomy by changing the law. The meetings were the first time Annah had spoken publicly about her experiences in the sex industry. She explained:

> At the time we were like, 'Oh gosh', we were nervous, like, 'Oh gosh, what the hell do we say? What do we do?' But we just had to put it all out there in these private conversations, like how we're sitting here, and share our stories. And a lot of times it was really emotional because you're sharing your story for the first time with a politician who hasn't got the faintest clue what this is about.

These meetings were a team effort and involved some sex workers writing about their experiences to share with politicians, and others attending the meetings in person:

> For me, because I've only ever been a massage parlour worker, I just got to speak about my sex work experience working at the Penthouse and, you know, some of the conditions that we had to work under. You know, the stuff around money being

> withheld, we weren't able to go to anyone, you couldn't even go to Small Claims for that because that money is under the table. And then some of the trans sex workers I was with got to share harrowing stories of police brutality and all that xenophobia stuff that they've experienced as trans sex workers working on the streets in Auckland. And there were tears. Yeah, just a lot of . . . in Māoritanga they say wairua, the spiritual realm of strength, and mana, and *tears*.

Annah's testimony also reflects the importance of having Māori and Pacific sex workers engage with Māori and Pacific MPs, whom she felt were better placed than Pākehā politicians to understand the extent of these workers' vulnerabilities under the law. She explained, 'We've got to talk with our own people because if anyone is going to hear our stories and understand the disparities, it's them. Because of colonisation and all that sort of stuff.'

Annah described a particularly moving meeting with Hon. Luamanuvao Dame Winnie Laban, who was the Labour MP for Mana when the Prostitution Reform Bill was before Parliament. Annah and others were conscious of the significance of Laban's vote. Laban's upbringing in a Christian household is well recognised. Less well known, perhaps, is her familiarity with the sex industry. Laban's maternal uncle, Pasi Tunupopo, was the first Samoan performer at Les Girls cabaret club in Sydney's Kings Cross and famously opened the Purple Onion striptease club in Wellington in 1964. Nevertheless, Laban represented a conservative, predominantly Christian Pacific electorate and voted against the Prostitution Reform Bill at its first and second readings. Annah explained:

> Some of the Pacific sex workers who weren't able to come down to Wellington – it was about money and we don't have the money to fly people halfway around the country – we had their stories already written and they had written letters and we gave those to Winnie Laban as well. It was supposed to be a very short lobby meeting but it felt like an hour, I'm not kidding, because there was a lot of crying and a lot of heartfelt storytelling about what our experiences were working in the sex industry. And I remember sharing with Winnie Laban about my experiences working in a brothel. I tend to work in white brothels because they don't hire a lot of Pacific workers

> and they're always trying to tell us to be something other than ourselves, you know, 'Say you're from Jamaica, or Mauritius, or something or other.' But apart from that stuff, I remember saying to Winnie the brothel I worked at fined us if we were late, if we were sick we got fined, we had to bring in a medical certificate, also at times when we had our period we had to work and even when we didn't want to we got fined. Then I was sharing with her those experiences, and not only my own but other workers', women's voices who had also had issues with establishments that some of us had worked at in Auckland and the impact the current law had on our lives.

Laban subsequently voted for decriminalisation and spoke in its favour at the third reading of the Prostitution Reform Bill. She described being particularly moved by Pacific trans and fa'afafine workers, many of whom were 'struggling to live a life of dignity' under legislation that made their working lives unsafe. She concluded: 'Whilst this Bill has its imperfections, it does provide greater protection for prostitutes and affords them the same rights as other workers.'[80]

Some activists and MPs were particularly conscious of how Māori were disproportionately affected by the law. Annah recalled accompanying one such sex worker, Kelly, to meet with a Labour Māori MP before the final vote:

> I remember he said to me, 'What are you going to do for my people?' And he was talking about tangata whenua sex workers. . . . I remember saying to him, it was like a promise, I said, 'For as long as I'm involved in NZPC [exhales deeply] I'll dedicate my life to tangata whenua sex workers.' Because all the experiences that tangata whenua and some of the Pacific sex workers were going through, they were criminalised for soliciting, and not once, a number of times.

The emotional impact of having such raw discussions with politicians was compounded by the realisation that anti-decriminalisation activists were having similar conversations with individual MPs to encourage them to vote against the Bill. Annah explained, 'We're walking the corridors in Parliament to different MPs' offices, and they would be coming out and we would be

going in straight after.' She likened the experience to 'sort of like *Return of the Jedi* [laughs], you know it was like that – light and darkness – I'm not kidding. But I believe that we were the light.'

Kelly was also closely involved in lobbying by sharing her experiences with individual MPs. These meetings were, she noted, a testament to the shift in attitudes towards sex workers. She explained, 'I used to say to my mum, "Isn't it incredible? When I was a sex worker nobody wanted to know. Now they're flying me to Parliament to consult" [laughs]. So that was an interesting change.' Kelly's experiences as a Māori woman were particularly important in conveying the significance decriminalisation would have for Māori workers. She remembered:

> [The MP] wanted to talk to me from a Māori perspective. And he said, 'What's this Bill going to do for Māori?' I said, 'Well, I'm not even going to go down what it's going to do. First, I want you to answer me, "What is the current Bill doing for Māori?" You give me a good answer on what this current Bill is doing for Māori and then I'll answer you what the new Bill can do.' And he couldn't answer that. He could not answer that. Lots had come out about intimidation, police bullshit, and all that sort of thing. . . . He actually ended up saying to me, 'Fair comment, fair comment.' I said, 'Okay. Now I can tell you what I believe the current Bill will do. It will give rights to Māori.' I wasn't going down [the route of] sex workers, I was talking Māori because that's where he wanted to go. 'This will give rights to the sex workers [so] that if they are abused by brothel owners, if they are abused by police, they can go in and make formal complaints. They can do these things that we can't do now.'

Such discussions were especially important considering well-documented cases of police racism against Māori both within and outside of the sex industry.[81]

Kelly was well aware of how workers' lives could be upended by laws that criminalised sex work. In 1989, she had lost her home and other assets following the Fitzgerald Inquiry in Queensland, which exposed widespread corruption by police and politicians (see Chapter Three). She explained:

> I lost my assets under the Criminal Law Act because of the corruption that went on in Queensland. Didn't matter that you paid tax, that didn't mean a damn thing, it was criminal. During that time lots of people got hit, lots of women got hit. At the time it was very tough, it's a time that I don't really like to go back and look at. You know, I lost my home, I lost my assets. So, when I came back to this country, I decided I was going to fight for things, hence law reform, hence trying to get the waiver for women who had not been paying tax. . . . I'm very proud of that, I can say I was part of making a law change in this country, and that's something that I'm very proud of. And that's something I always say to my son: 'Well, one day you can say your mother was instrumental to making law change.' Prostitution might not be [laughs] what you think is a great change for anyone else, but we did that. And my son was the very first person I rang when we got out of the gallery.

Kelly's involvement in advocating for decriminalisation in New Zealand also put her at risk of further unwanted attention from the police. She explained that, one month before the final vote on the Prostitution Reform Bill, four police officers visited the two-storey apartment on K Road where she lived and worked. They questioned the three other women who worked from her apartment, asked to search their belongings, and warned Kelly to shut down her business within twenty-four hours. She described the experience as 'scare tactics' and 'all about intimidation'. Kelly was certainly not alone in questioning the timing of a visit from police. Two months earlier, in March 2003, undercover police arrested and charged eight sex workers in the K Road area with soliciting. The NZPC and Green MP Sue Bradford condemned the heightened police activity considering the Prostitution Reform Bill was before Parliament.[82]

The immediate aftermath of the law

The Prostitution Reform Act removed criminal charges for soliciting, brothel-keeping and living off the earnings of sex work, and specified that sex workers were protected under health and safety employment legislation. Decriminalisation transformed the lives of many of those in the industry. Sex workers have attested to experiencing better working conditions, greater

power to refuse particular clients, and heightened self-esteem while working in situations where they have described feeling 'supported and safe'.[83] This is not to suggest the NZPC was satisfied with all aspects of the law. Sex worker activists and allies have elsewhere outlined their responses to the various iterations of the Prostitution Reform Bill as it was presented to Parliament for the second and third readings. They were supportive of some amendments. These included a clause that waived the usual two-week penalty for leaving a job voluntarily if an individual decided to stop sex work and apply for the unemployment benefit. They also supported an amendment that required police to produce a search warrant before entering a brothel, as was the case with other businesses.[84]

Yet the 'sense that we were losing ground rapidly' with declining support from some MPs, coupled with the urgency of what appeared to be the police's escalating arrests of Māori street-based workers as the Bill moved to the final vote, meant they had to compromise on various amendments.[85] As Catherine explained, several amendments 'were presented as a fait accompli. We had no control over these aspects of the parliamentary process. The whole process was very quick, and pressure was building as the final vote approached.'[86] One particularly controversial clause for sex workers was the exclusion of migrant workers on temporary visas under Section 19 of the Prostitution Reform Bill.

In March 2003, Immigration Minister Lianne Dalziel, who had previously spoken in favour of decriminalisation, asked the Parliamentary Counsel Office to draft an amendment that prohibited people on temporary visas from engaging in sex work or from running brothels.[87] This meant that people could be refused a visa if they were believed to intend to work in the industry, and faced deportation if they were found to be working in the area.[88] Dalziel had become minister of immigration in 1999, and introduced the clause as a Supplementary Order Paper as a safeguard against human trafficking.[89] However, as criminologist Lynzi Armstrong argues, '[I]t is unclear just how this clause could help to prevent trafficking.'[90] As many others have pointed out, the fear of arrest or being deported deters people from engaging with police or support services and makes them more vulnerable to exploitation.[91] Rather, sex workers entering New Zealand on temporary visas were (and are still) forced to work illegally, which exposes them to various forms of risk.[92]

The passage of the Prostitution Reform Bill into law certainly outraged its opponents. Four months after decriminalisation, in October 2003, police

in Wellington launched their first raid on a local massage parlour since the early 1990s. Catherine explained:

> The police stormed in there, threw open the doors of the rooms where the clients were with the sex workers, threw the clients up against the walls, asked them their names, questioned the sex workers, and took their names. And said they were looking for pāua that shouldn't have been fished for, underaged children, and migrant sex workers. Three things. Three very different things. It was a real exercise in, 'We'll show you. You might think you've gotten away with this law change, but we are the real power here.' And that was so extraordinary.

The explicit opposition to law reform was also clear when several councils introduced bylaws that restricted the areas where sex workers could operate. The Prostitution Reform Act gave territorial authorities the power to restrict signage that advertised commercial sexual services and the location of brothels. It garnered criticism from some councils that expressed frustration at being tasked with controlling the location of brothels.[93] In July 2004, Christchurch City Council adopted the Christchurch City Brothels (Location and Signage) Bylaw, which restricted brothels to the central business district.[94] They had reportedly received nearly 1500 submissions on brothels in the first five months after law reform, many of which asked them to restrict the location of these brothels.[95] Two months later, in September, Hamilton City Council passed the Prostitution Bylaw 2004, which prohibited street-based work and limited brothels to a small area in the CBD and an industrial suburb, neither of which zones, the NZPC argued, were 'conducive to the safety and health of sex workers'.[96] That same year, Manukau City Council passed a bylaw that banned most home-based sex work and restricted the location of brothels.[97] It also attempted to outlaw street-based sex work through the Manukau City Council (Control of Street Prostitution) Bill 2005. The Bill would have prohibited sex workers and their clients from soliciting in a public place and carried a fine of $10,000. To the relief of sex workers and allies, the Bill was defeated at its second reading in October 2006. Public health researchers at the time raised concerns that these plans to reduce sex workers' visibility by restricting them to more isolated areas would in turn increase their vulnerability to theft, physical

assaults and sexual violence. They would also give police the power to question and arrest those they believed to be operating in an illegal area, and break down cooperation between sex workers and police, who 'will once again be seen as the enemy'.[98]

Catherine had raised these concerns in an early 2004 issue of *Siren*. She acknowledged the increasing pressure local councils had faced from campaigners to ban sex workers and businesses and argued the 'notion of the brothel on the corner, and the whore next door is a trigger for many irrational, ludicrous claims'.[99] The immediate reaction to the passage of the Prostitution Reform Bill put increasing pressure on sex work activists. Catherine explained:

> I imagined that there would be some rest, there would be a settling-in period and things would relax. That didn't happen at all. We had to continue to defend the law, to talk about its attributes, to explain errors. We also went into a very intense time with city councils. The lobbying groups moved their attention of course away from the MPs and went to the city councils and started to lobby them to say, 'Okay, now you're charged with the zoning of brothels. What are you going to do?' And so, we had these city councils that started to draft bylaws, and so we had to lobby again on a different kind of level with city councils. Lots of them around the country. Lots of them.

The introduction of bylaws required several more years of lobbying, public speaking and submissions to local councils, which continue at the time of writing. For Annah, 'the war was on. You never lie down in this business because you have to always keep going.'

Together, the oral histories offer deeper insight into the experiences of some of the individuals responsible for New Zealand's pioneering sex worker legislation. Their testimonies reveal sex workers' urgent need for law reform amidst raids from police and having their condoms confiscated, the actions they took to make the industry safer, and how they reflect on this period nearly two decades later. Narrators expressed particularly strong emotions when they described engaging with individual MPs in Parliament and sharing stories of racism and exploitation alongside their peers. The passage of the Prostitution Reform Bill in June 2003 was the culmination

of sixteen years of action from the NZPC – which had been agitating for decriminalisation since its inception in 1987 – and its allies. The law changes enabled sex workers to work without the risk of being arrested and to gain protection under employment legislation. In this regard, the legislation reflected the NZPC's determination to have sex work recognised as a legitimate occupation. The support it gained from women's organisations and other groups revealed the increasing awareness of the double standard that criminalised sex workers and not their clients. Nevertheless, activists in favour of decriminalisation faced significant resistance, especially in the early 2000s, from conservative politicians and abolitionists who deemed sex work as inherently harmful. (The tension between liberal and radical feminists will be explored further in the next chapter.)

Decriminalisation was a crucial moment in the history of sex workers' rights, but it was not the endpoint. The close vote of 60 to 59 reflected a society still very divided on this topic. The addition of last-minute amendments that prohibited people on temporary visas from working in the sex industry, and the passage of bylaws almost immediately after the Prostitution Reform Act came into law, are two particularly explicit examples of how politicians have responded to fears about sex work. Many of these fears are based on stereotypes about sex workers, and have led to clauses that can potentially harm, rather than protect, the lives of those in the industry.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Reflections on Work

'Sex workers, and people who've been sex workers, there's something really cool about them,' Kate explained. Kate had worked for an escort agency and massage parlour for eleven months in the late 1980s. When asked to reflect on the history of sex work towards the end of our interview in June 2021, she concluded: 'They're kind of really straightforward, they're kind of down to earth. They seem like people that don't take any shit, and they've got good senses of humour. And they're quite staunch.' Other interviewees echoed Kate's sentiment. They spoke to the strength and charisma of others they have encountered in the industry and the diversity of the sex worker population. Alex had been working in the sex industry for three decades when we met for an interview in Auckland in 2019. She affirmed:

> To be a sex worker you need to have a certain amount of resilience. So, the thing about working girls and boys is that they come from all situations. And I hear people say, 'Oh, if you're in the industry you had a really terrible life . . .' But that isn't strictly true. Some do, and for some, it's just a really good way to pay your bills. It's not emotionally upsetting, they don't engage in that manner. They just step in and out of the industry and make money.

These reflections captured some of the key themes that emerged from the interviews. Several narrators emphasised their respect for their peers, the skills and personal attributes that they identified as necessary to succeed in

the industry and, above all, that sex work is a job like any other. Kate's and Alex's use of the third-person pronoun 'they', when describing groups to which they belong, is suggestive. They were perhaps not simply defending themselves as sex workers – there may also have been an element of humility when identifying oneself in such positive terms – but rather challenging negative depictions of sex workers more broadly.

This chapter examines how narrators remembered and reflected on their involvement in sex work over the past four decades. It highlights some narrators' portrayal of sex work as an expression of their feminist politics, their feelings of solidarity with other workers, and the emotional labour of acting as clients' unofficial – and sometimes unwitting – counsellors and confidants. Sex work certainly is a legitimate occupation. Yet the moral weight placed on sex and sexuality means it has attracted a level of speculation, regulation and judgement that is perhaps unparalleled in other professions.[1] Criminologists have noted how popular portrayals of sex workers diminish them to problematic tropes 'such as that of the kidnapped underage sex slave or simply the unnamed dead body', rather than 'complex human beings, with families, hobbies and diverse needs and aspirations'.[2] As this chapter reveals, such reductive depictions of sex workers did not correlate with narrators' interpretations of sex work. Their testimonies reveal how individuals remember and made meaning of their experiences in an industry that has been the centre of public discussions, often without the input of sex workers themselves.

Sex work during the sex wars

In March 1989, the feminist magazine *Broadsheet* featured the headline 'Prostitutes: The Avant-Garde or the Traitors of the Women's Movement?' The accompanying article brought attention to what its author, an NZPC founding member named Saskia, identified as the absence of sex workers' voices in the women's movement. She argued, 'There is a lot of talk about prostitution but seldom talk *with* prostitutes. There is an image, but there are never real people whose opinions are asked for.' Such images included 'idealistic' stereotypes of female sex workers as 'independent, the money-making avant-garde of the women's movement', as 'traitors of the whole movement', or as 'victim[s] who need help to find the way back to society'.[3]

The article spoke to heated debates about sex work among feminists, which were especially pronounced during the feminist sex wars of the late

1970s to the early 1990s.[4] The sex wars were predominantly characterised by a division between liberal feminists, who viewed sex work as a legitimate form of labour, and radical feminists who denounced sex work and 'so-called deviant sexualities' including pornography and BDSM as degrading and exploitative.[5] These competing views on sex work emerged in two of the interviews that feature in this book. Narrators were particularly reflective about balancing their positions as sex workers with also being members of separatist-leaning lesbian feminist networks that opposed the industry.

Jeanie described an angry 'road to feminism'. She had experienced a socially conservative upbringing with her parents and four siblings in 1960s Wellington and had little exposure to feminism and other social movements that were underway at the time. It was when she started taking astrology lessons at the Women's Resource Centre as a young adult that she 'realised there was a bigger context for our lives as women. It was all quite "wow"'. Jeanie's understanding of sexuality evolved around the same time, which can partly be attributed to the increasing visibility of lesbian activism. The early 1970s signalled a 'new era in lesbian organising'. These included the first lesbian club, the KG Club (Karangahape Road Girls Club or the Kamp Girls Club), which opened in Auckland in the summer of 1971–72 and predominantly featured a working class and Māori clientele.[6] The first lesbian organisation, Sisters for Homophile Equality (SHE), began shortly afterwards in Christchurch and Wellington in 1973. This was followed by the first National Lesbian Conference in Wellington in 1974, regional workshops and meetings, and Herstory Press, a feminist press run by lesbians that printed and distributed newspapers, posters, magazines and books from 1974 to 1980.[7] Jeanie described 'getting really more and more into an understanding of feminism and lesbianism. I remember being sexually involved first with a woman and then going, Okay, am I going to call myself lesbian or not? Am I going to take this label on board and all that means?' With a background as a musician, Jeanie started a punk band with friends that became 'quite a mouthpiece for our passions about things, about women. We wrote songs that had lyrics – about how men treated women, and all sorts of stuff like that – that were quite passionate.' The anger in their music deterred many of their peers, 'and all the lesbians who liked this very nice west coast, sort of guitar, singing, lyrical, tuneful, "Oh, how beautiful it is to be a woman" kind of music, they *hated* our band!'

Jeanie started sex work shortly after she moved to Auckland to train as an opera singer at the age of twenty-one in 1979. She had a part-time

position at a telephone exchange and gained a second job at a massage parlour on Karangahape Road to save money to buy a new piano. Jeanie appeared to be nonchalant about starting sex work: 'I can't remember why the thought came to me that I could go and work at a massage parlour.' The work was simply 'a means to an end'. She explained:

> I did see that maybe it wouldn't be too much work for a good return. Obviously, I had a conversation that I no longer recall with someone who said, 'Oh, you know, you could make quite good money this way. And you work in the evening, so you've got your days free to do other things.' And it all seemed quite ideal, I guess.

Jeanie's perception of sex work as an ideal occupation was a recurring theme throughout the interview. The flexibility of the work and her earning potential were certainly major benefits of the job. Jeanie remained at the massage parlour for several months before she moved back to Wellington. She returned to the industry in late 1982 when she and her partner gained jobs at the Sultan's Tent in Wellington to save money to travel overseas. While her partner worked as a masseuse, Jeanie felt that 'somehow I was all right for money, and I didn't really want to', and she instead worked as a receptionist with the occasional outcall.

For Jeanie, engaging in sex work was an expression – not a betrayal – of her feminism. While some of their friends 'were really amazingly supportive', she remembered, 'there was one woman who basically slapped [my partner] in the face. Literally like, "How could you do this?"' Her friend's opposition to sex work directly contrasted with Jeanie's stance on the industry. She explained that 'from a feminist perspective, you're choosing to be empowered because you're saying, well, I can do this, it doesn't water down any of my other strong passionate feelings about women or anything'. She continued:

> I suppose in a way it was [a] kind of idealism that allowed us to do it. That we could reconcile being these supposedly, obviously not really separatists, but we had lots of separatist ideals. And we really were passionate about the rights of women and that lesbians be accepted in society and that we weren't to [associate] with men, except we happened to fuck

> them for money. I mean it was all quite [laughs] – from the perspective of now – this quite bizarre mix of things. But you know, I think what fuelled me was that we could go, 'Oh, I can fuck you, and you can pay me money, and I can do that.' And it was sort of based on a [blows raspberry], angry. . . . It wasn't that I even recall being particularly directly angry with the guys. As I say, they're faceless. It wasn't really about them in the end. It was about, we can do this because we're radical dykes so we can do anything!

The significance of resistance in lesbian oral histories is well acknowledged. As the late New Zealand feminist activist and scholar Alison Laurie argues, 'lesbian tellers and listeners enjoy stories depicting lesbians in control'.[8] The establishment of lesbian separatism is itself an important act of resistance. Scholars have highlighted its emergence as a response to the exclusion lesbians faced from heterosexual women in the second-wave feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and from gay men in the gay liberation movement.[9] Consequently, 'lesbian separatists constructed their identity via creative and political works, such as music, art, film, literature, theatre, and craft', and created 'social spaces in which lesbians could gather and celebrate themselves, building positive lesbian identities'.[10] Yet Jeanie struggled with their explicit exclusion of men: 'For me,' she explained, 'people are people.' Further, on a practical level, she found New Zealand's population was too small to achieve the absolute separation from men that they envisioned.

Jeanie's activist ideals may have also helped her to manage her discomfort with the job itself. As the interview progressed, she explained:

> At the core of it, I don't think I ever really got comfortable enough with what I was doing. Honestly not. I mean, take away all the other stuff which we can get into about the culture and how it related to the lesbian culture of the time and all that stuff, that was all very interesting and all very thought-provoking. But the actual job of taking my clothes off, massaging some stranger who'd taken his clothes off and trying to get his rocks off for him . . . nah [laughs], not something that I could say I was ever a natural or really highly suited to doing actually, to be honest. It was more of

> an idea of something that in reality was kind of icky a lot of the time. It was messy and you're always on guard.

Kate, like Jeanie, also experienced misgivings about elements of separatism. Kate had moved to Wellington in 1980, during 'an era of radical politics in universities'. She remembered attending a particularly transformative meeting on rape at the Women's Resource Centre. The meeting was:

> super scary. I really hadn't known what to expect and I still had long hair with a little Farrah Fawcett flick and stuff. And probably a little bit of makeup. I just hadn't really thought that they would be staunch and that you weren't meant to wear a dress and stuff [laughs]. I went to this meeting, I didn't normally look this conservative, but I had quite a conservative outfit on, like a grey tweed skirt and a pale pink top and my hair in a bun or something and boots with high heels. Fuck, I felt like such a dick [laughs]. There were really staunch women there, there were like lesbian separatists, like angry lesbian separatists who seemed old but were probably only five years older than me. But quite staunch women, *really mad* at men. And I hadn't really understood that; I didn't think that feminism meant excluding men from things, I hadn't seen it like that. I wasn't even sure if I thought a Women's Resource Centre was a good idea, or separate women's groups or whatever, I kind of thought, Oh, it seems a bit weird to be excluding men from it. I was very young and hadn't thought about it really, but I got such a scare at this meeting, and I felt incredibly out of place and weird. But somebody who'd been quite quiet at it, who worked for Rape Crisis, she spoke to me afterwards and we walked up to The Terrace together and she was really nice to me.

Kate became increasingly involved in the lesbian feminist scene over the following months but, as was the case with Jeanie, remained uncomfortable with the explicit exclusion of men. Bisexuality was another silence in the community. She explained:

> There definitely was an attitude that you really weren't meant to be heterosexual. You know, it was thought of as sleeping with the enemy, men were the enemy. And bisexuality wasn't even a thing on anyone's radar at all. I had always thought I was bisexual, actually, from when I was quite young. From my teens or whatever, once I discovered that was a thing. I was like, Oh yeah, that sounds like me. But the thing was, you had to state your loyalties to one thing or another. And so, after a bit, I really wanted to come out as a lesbian but I hadn't even kissed a woman so I felt like I couldn't. But then I was involved in organising a women's conference, this was probably '82 or so. And we ran a workshop at it, a young women's workshop. And there was a woman who had been involved in feminist activism at her school who came up for it. And we had a bit of a pash [laughs] and then after that, I was like, Okay! Even in the time of the conference, like a day after kissing her I was like, Right, I'm a lesbian!

Kate subsequently moved into a flat with other lesbian activists and 'threw myself into all of that'.

Although Kate's peers did not openly discuss bisexuality, it was certainly on the radar for other women in her wider network. At another point in her interview, Kate described struggling to reconcile her attraction to men while identifying as lesbian in a community that opposed opposite-sex relations. Kate established a support group for bisexual women when she returned to Wellington from living overseas in the late 1980s. She described it as 'a funny time' when people confided in her about their secret sexual liaisons with men, and others displayed signs outside women-only dances that read '"Bisexuals fuck off". People were quite anti; it wasn't very nice.' Oral history interviews have revealed a similar 'polarising and ongoing debate' among Auckland's lesbian community in the 1970s and 1980s. Some lesbians reportedly perceived bisexuals as 'so-called "dibbler-dabblers" who would eventually return to the safety and social acceptability of heterosexual relationships, leaving broken-hearted lesbians in their wake'.[11]

One article in the winter 1994 issue of *Broadsheet* described biphobia as 'a feminist challenge'. The author condemned feminist writings that depicted bisexuals as 'possess[ing] an alarming number of unpleasant and often contradictory traits – when our existence is accepted'.[12] These

publications included *Finding Out: A Booklet for Young Women Who Are Attracted to Other Women* (1992), and the edited collection *Out Front: Lesbian Political Activity in Aotearoa* (1993), published by the Lesbian Press in Hamilton, in which bisexual women were deemed a 'disruptive and actively anti-lesbian faction within the gay movement in the 1970s and 1980s'.[13]

Some lesbians' involvement in sex work was another silence in the lesbian feminist movement. Writing in the same 1994 issue of *Broadsheet*, one author argued that constructions of sex between women as the best sex for feminists had been achieved at the expense of women, like lesbian sex workers, who were perceived as perpetuating women's sexual oppression by having sex with men.[14] Consequently, 'we, as lesbian feminists, have recrafted our lives to make this shared herstory [between lesbian feminist politics and the sex industry] invisible'.[15]

Kate reflected on her shifting views on sex work as she became more involved in radical feminism. She explained that as a teenager in the late 1970s and very early 1980s:

> I would've thought that sex work was really exploitative and terrible. Well, I don't know, actually, maybe I was young enough to not really know that. But as a radical feminist in the next couple of years, I definitely would've thought that sex work was a terrible thing and that it was really harmful to women, and that it was men paying to maybe enslave women, and force women to do things against their will.

Kate's perspective had shifted considerably by the time she started working for an escort agency in December 1988. She had become familiar with sex work several years earlier, when a small group of women from Wellington's lesbian feminist scene began working at the Sultan's Tent. Kate remembered, 'I had a bit of a feminist take on the whole thing, like getting heaps of money from these guys and stuff and putting in minimum effort. Not ever trying to be amazing at it, doing the bare minimum and just getting the money. And getting lots of money.'

Together, the interviews reveal how narrators interpreted their involvement in sex work as an act of feminism, albeit within a complex set of social and sexual dynamics. Their narratives can be read as resistance: not only against the stereotypes that belittle sex workers, but also against

the silence that, some argued, suppressed recognition of lesbian activists' involvement in sex work.

Becoming one of the group

For some of the narrators, becoming involved in sex work either established or solidified their connections with others in the industry. Sojourn placed particular emphasis on his friendships with fa'afafine sex workers in Wellington who helped him to discover and eventually embrace his sexuality. He had not expected to work in the sex industry. In 1986, the eighteen-year-old chef moved from his home town in the central North Island to Wellington. He was ready to venture out. Sojourn quickly found comfort with friends from his netball team, whom he described as 'the fa'afafine sisterhood', and moved in with them shortly afterwards:

> I got to meet a lot of their families as well and saw how loved and respected they were amongst their families. Most of them, not all of them. And because they had a family that loved them, they were always invited to family occasions and socials. And I got to see that love for diversity, I guess; in my Western eyes I was thinking these are queens and their families love them and actually celebrate them.

These friends worked as sex workers on Vivian Street and Marion Street. One evening, he decided to join them. For Sojourn, 'dressing up was never about being a sex worker because for me it was the joy of dressing up and being . . . a woman. It just brought me this joy of being somebody else.' Nevertheless, he inadvertently started sex work when a client approached him:

> There came a time when a car stopped for me. And that was the first time I ever tried sex work. And I noticed the girls were looking and pointing and some of them were laughing. So, I didn't know what that was about. But anyway, this guy said, 'Do you wanna go for a ride?' And I said [imitates high voice], 'Yep' [laughs]. Still trying to be girly, not trying to be a sex worker but trying to be a woman. You know, just a girl going on a date. That was on my mind. But this guy, all he wanted was for me to pull up my skirt so he could look

> at my thighs and pantyhose and get off on that. So, for that I earned $15, an INXS tape, the latest INXS tape, and an orange [laughs]. So that was my first ever payment as a sex worker [laughs].

Over the next few months, he accepted several more clients, 'but you know, only made twenty bucks [laughs]'. Sojourn subsequently earned the nickname Charity Queen, as someone who 'gave it away for very cheap prices'.

Sojourn's vision of himself as 'just a girl going on a date' with his first client captured how the street scene enabled him to 'get in touch with my cross-dressing side'. This was something he had explored as an adolescent:

> When I was thirteen or fourteen, I used to dress up in my mum's clothes [laughs]. I remember Saturday was the sports day and my brothers and sisters would go and play their sports and Mum and Dad would take them. And I'd be home, I'd be like Cinderella, I'd be home doing all the housework: cleaning the house, and doing the cooking, and doing all that for the family to come back from their sports. But as soon as they'd go, I'd get my outfit together [laughs]. I used to put on my mum's shoes and high heels, white ones with a gold buckle, get a dressing gown, and get my hair tied up. Like you know when you wrap your hair up in a towel to dry it? You sort of wrap it up and flick it over. Well, my mum had a black hair piece that I used to put on, twist my towel up into my hair and then I'd attach the hair piece from the top and have it dangling down so it looked like my real hair was wrapped up in there [laughs]. And then I'd get two volleyballs and put them in my dressing gown [as breasts] and do the vacuuming and the housework dressed all like that [laughs]. Oh, and a couple of times I nearly got caught, but that was my buzz.

For Sojourn, the joy of dressing up rested on the ability to adopt a new persona. He clarified:

> It was nothing sexual, I wasn't getting turned on by it. The buzz was, I guess, just being a drag queen and just being feminine. And then I thought to myself, Am I transgender?

> Do I want to be a woman? And I knew even then, no I don't, I just want to dress up and have fun. And that's what meeting up with the fa'afafine was meant to be because they were all about that as well.

Sojourn remembered dressing up with his housemates in Wellington as an extension of the dress-up play that he had enjoyed as a teenager. He fondly reflected on his housemates hosting Miss World competitions at home, with speeches and costumes. Sojourn credited his friends' abilities to make significant amounts of money to them having 'the right attitude'. It was certainly at odds with his approach to being on the street, and he conceded: 'If I had a different attitude, I would have made more money 'cause my look was okay, but I was too busy trying to pretend to be a real woman [laughs] and pass as a real woman.'

Sojourn's recollections of dressing up with friends perhaps overshadowed his more complex memories of struggling with his physical appearance. As the interview progressed, he explained that his reluctance to be seen without clothes prevented him from making money as a sex worker. He explained:

> When it came to having sex dressed in drag, as a fa'afafine, or as a transvestite, or transgender, it felt really uncomfortable. So, then I started thinking, Oh well, maybe I could just hang out on the streets while they're working. Not to be a sex worker, because I didn't feel comfortable being seen. I was very hairy, and it was a lot of hard work to cover it all up and try and be feminine and be a lady, not understanding that that's actually what a lot of the guys were after.

Sojourn's memories of working in Wellington reflect a distinct period in his life when he identified as fa'afafine, lived in a fa'afafine household, and spent time socialising with his housemates' families. After living in Wellington for two years, he returned to his parents' home and gained a job in a timber mill to save money to travel overseas. He presented himself as a heterosexual cisgender man, and explained, 'I totally changed the way I behaved, and looked, walked, and talked. And suddenly I became conscious of sounding effeminate and gay because I was surrounded by all these masculine men.'

Sojourn's discomfort with sex work once again emerged when he described working on William Street in Kings Cross, Sydney, in 1992. He was determined to make money this time, and 'I took it seriously and I had to get a look together that was marketable'. He grew his hair long, wore bold makeup, and dressed in elegant blazers. Yet unlike his friends who were 'ruthless about prices' and 'just used to rake in all the money', Sojourn once again struggled with the work:

> It was my livelihood, so I had to be a bit serious about it. But again, the attitude. Like, guys would stop and I'd be going, 'What's happening for you?' 'What's going on at home?' 'Why are you out tonight?' And they'd be going, 'What?' And I'd be going, 'What's going on for you at home?' And they'd be going, 'Oh, shut up. I just want a blow job' [laughs]. So again, I was more about being a social worker than an actual sex worker. And for me, I got to just really play dress-up and pretend. But I didn't make a lot of money because I didn't have the right attitude.

When questioned on how he overcame his anxiety about being seen undressed, he explained: 'I never got over it, which is why I never stripped down naked with a man while I was dressed up, even if I just had my face on. I don't think I've ever done that.'

Sojourn's experiences with sex work marked a clear departure from those of his fa'afafine peers. He dressed up in the evenings only, and had other full-time employment as a chef in Wellington and in Kings Cross, which meant he was not reliant on an income from sex work. 'It was only a glimpse compared to the workers that were there for their livelihood,' he explained. 'I got to be a part of their world for a moment in time; it became my world for a very short time.' Given his experiences overall, it is open to question whether Sojourn would have identified as a sex worker and responded to my call for interviewees, had we not met through separate history projects on the HIV and AIDS epidemic. Sojourn's testimony therefore offers a perspective that might have otherwise been missing from this book.

Being part of the sex industry carried significant meaning for Cherida, who remembered an immediate identity change after her first shift with an escort agency in the mid-2000s. Cherida was raised in Southland and moved to Auckland at the age of seventeen in early 1994 to train as a

beautician. She spent nearly a decade working as a professional makeup artist and beauty therapist in Auckland and Wellington, and during her OE in London. Her first contact with sex workers came through her wider social network, which congregated at the Hole in the Wall bar in Wellington. She explained: 'I remember someone telling me that [two women] were sex workers – or they wouldn't have said sex workers, they would've said prostitutes – and me kind of going "Ooh", that sounded scary to me.'

Cherida initially traced the start of her career in the industry to late 2003. She recounted researching and applying for work, and doubting whether the agency and the clients would accept her. At the time, she was managing a beauty salon in Wellington, but 'I was on this mega saving budget' to earn enough money to return to her boyfriend in London:

> My colleague in the beauty salon, she was a real down-to-earth kind of bogan chick from the Hutt. And I was saying 'Oh, I need more money,' and I was like, 'I think I might do sex work.' I mean, I didn't have the language back then, so I don't know the words I would've used, but it probably wasn't 'sex work'. And she was like, 'Oh well, let's ring some places!' And I was like, 'No! I'm too shy, I can't ring up!' She's like, 'Okay, I'll ring for you.' So, we went through the Yellow Pages when there were no clients in the salon and we found this one place, 'cause I was like, 'I don't wanna work in one of those places where they can come and see you,' I didn't want to work and be on show. It felt weird. Anyway, so the first place we rang was First Impressions. And she rang and pretended to be me, 'cause it was just a voice. But then they asked for her description on the phone – you know, 'What bust size are you?' And she was like, 'Oh, what bust size am I?' And I'd have to go [mimics whispering], 'Double D.' 'Double D.' And then they were like, 'Oh, can you come in tomorrow?' So, she kind of set up the appointment pretending to be me. And then all of a sudden, they were expecting me the next day! So, I went in thinking that I wouldn't be pretty enough, or that it was going to be like an interview, and they were going to check if I was good enough. And then I got in and they were like, 'When can you start?'

Cherida's concerns about whether she was attractive enough for the work emerged again as she waited for her first client in an apartment the agency had rented. 'I was shaking. I was so nervous mainly that they were going to reject me; I wasn't going to be pretty enough. I was going to be too fat. I wasn't worried about safety or danger or violence or anything like that, I just was terrified of being rejected.' The fear of being rejected by clients was not uncommon. Speaking in interviews with the editors of *Siren*, others described feeling '[f]at, nervous and very unseductive' on their first shift.[16]

The emotional impact of starting sex work became apparent to Cherida as she walked home after her first shift: 'I remember leaving work and walking along Marion Street past the queens, the sex workers that stood on Marion Street, the trans workers that all worked there and there were a couple still out. And I remember walking past them and thinking, Ooh, I'm one of you now.'

The identity shift and her affinity with other workers have not faded with time. Cherida explained:

> It did immediately kind of feel like I joined a club in a way. You know, I think you cross over. 'Cause even though I haven't done sex work for ten years now I still feel like I'm part of the club [laughs]. It's kind of an identity shift that will never shift back. So, I remember just kind of feeling, I wouldn't call it a sense of pride, but a sense of camaraderie, and solidarity, and now I understood a bit more about these workers on the street that I lived right next to and would walk past all the time because I lived on Marion Street. But that night I had a different feeling. . . . I felt more like we were sisters.

The immediate shift in identity Cherida experienced when she started with the agency was so significant that it overshadowed her memories of being involved in sex work before 2003. When asked whether she had considered continuing with sex work when she returned to London in 2004, she explained:

> I did manage to pick up casual [sex] work in London, totally unintentionally, when I worked in Harvey Nichols [department store]. . . . Oh, so I actually started doing sex work really before. . . . It was before I started doing sex work here.

Oh okay, so your first time was actually in London [between 2000 and 2003]?
Yeah, because I was working at Harvey Nichols. And that was before I came back. Yeah. That changes everything! [laughs].

There is a clear distinction between Cherida seeking out a job with the escort agency in Wellington, and engaging in casual sex work when a customer at Harvey Nichols department store requested a private massage later that evening. Cherida went on to make enquiries into escort work after she returned to London in 2004. Yet the prospect of working against the law, coupled with the working conditions – where clients could make anonymous bookings online – meant she decided against it.

The emotional labour of sex work

In May 1991, the *Evening Post* featured an interview with Kay'la, one of the narrators in this book. Kay'la identified her strong listening skills and her experience as a trained counsellor as among her key strengths. She concluded, 'That's a big part of the job. Often these men just want someone to talk to.'[17] Another sex worker interviewed for the *Bay of Plenty Times* in August 1995 identified sex as 10 per cent of the job. They explained, 'The rest is listening, cuddling, massaging, counselling, being a friend. There are a lot of really lonely, lonely people out there.'[18] As the above examples indicate, many sex workers embraced the emotional support they gave clients as simply part of the job. They acted as confidants to whom clients disclosed difficulties at work or struggles in their relationships. Yet this unseen and often unacknowledged aspect of the work had a significant toll on workers.

Sex work activists had raised concerns that the time workers spent counselling their clients was potentially detrimental to their businesses. In 2000, the editors of *Siren* acknowledged that some sex workers reported feeling like unofficial therapists, social workers and marriage guidance counsellors.[19] In addition to the emotional strain of spending hours hearing about others' struggles, they cautioned readers that 'if [clients] spend their time talking to you about their problems, they may not remember the encounter with you as being a particularly good one, and may avoid you in the future'.[20]

Kim decided to pursue a career in social work after dealing with so many clients who confided in her. This discussion arose when I asked about her encounters with police before decriminalisation. She responded:

I've never had an issue with police, we've had them as clients [laughs]. Even pre-law I had ones that were up there in the police force. Especially those that do sexual abuse on children stuff, I saw a couple. So, I got a lot of them telling me about their jobs and stuff. Because it was just [whispers] they don't know us, we're so much easier to talk to. We're people they just lie down next to, and they can go ya, ya, ya, ya, ya. We don't know who they are, we don't know their real name. We get to know what they do for a living and some of their jobs are really hard. So, we're just an ear. Goes in one ear and out the other. It has to. We can't take that home with us, we can't keep that with us, that's not part of our jobs to do that anyway. I mean it's one of the reasons I got into social work: we saw some of the clients coming through and the issues they were having in themselves.

Kim was especially conscious of experiencing burnout:

The thing about sex work is you can always come back to it [laughs], it never goes away. And you don't have any interviews. Just put an ad in the paper.
Have you found that you've dipped in and out at times?
Oh yes! Oh yeah, you always have time out. I tell people when I'm at NZPC with the new workers, 'Don't burn yourself out, have time out.' If you feel like you burn yourself out, and you're not getting your clients, and you're tired, and you're ratty, and you're just rude: time out. It's good that some of them have other jobs so they've still got income coming in. I did that in the beginning. And I worked seven days a week, 24/7. You don't realise how much effect it has on your body, on your mind, because you're listening to everybody's problems.

In 1993, the editors of *Siren* affirmed that sex work was 'a very demanding profession physically, mentally and emotionally', where workers were 'expected to work long hours, eat fast foods, lend an ear, a shoulder to cry on, arrange the baby-sitter, keep the home fire burning and still look a million dollars 24 hours a day'.[21] They advised readers to either try to save money to take a complete break from sex work or to reduce their shifts and supplement

their income with a means-tested benefit.[22] In 1997, American sexologist and public personality Annie Sprinkle brought attention to the prevalence of what she called Sex Worker Burnout Syndrome as 'one of the hazards – by-products if you will – of our titillating trades'.[23] The term 'burnout' had gained traction in the 1970s to describe emotional exhaustion among service workers, including teachers, psychotherapists and counsellors.[24] Multiple studies have drawn connections between burnout among sex workers and burnout among professionals performing emotional labour in other industries.[25] In the context of sex work, Sprinkle cautioned readers that the symptoms, including depression, tiredness, dissatisfaction and low self-esteem, could last for years; among other strategies, she advised readers to develop a support network with peers and a sex-positive therapist.[26]

In 2005, the editors of *Siren* brought attention to the symptoms of Sex Worker Burnout Syndrome in a feature titled 'How to Stay a Happy Hooker'. They advised readers to take care of themselves by exercising, taking regular breaks, and pursuing courses and hobbies to develop their other skills. The latter was necessary so that 'if at any stage burnout is no longer a passing phase, you have other options. Simply knowing you have a *choice* is liberating in itself.'[27] Considering the financial cost of stopping work, it was perhaps more reasonable for workers to be able to take a break from the industry with the implementation of the Prostitution Reform Act 2003. The authors pointed out that under Section 18 of the Act, sex workers could immediately access a benefit without having to wait the usual stand-down period that applies for leaving a job.[28] As public health researcher Gillian Abel argues, this section was part of a wider aim to protect sex workers from exploitation, and 'to ensure the state is not forcing someone to work [or to continue to work] as a sex worker'.[29]

Other narrators recalled compartmentalising their interactions with clients to protect themselves emotionally. Elliot grew up in Wellington in the 1980s and 1990s. He described his sexual experiences as 'quite delayed' and did not have girlfriends or experiment sexually beyond masturbation until he was in his mid-twenties. Instead, he 'just had [his] head in a book' and described himself as the 'loner who sat at the back of the class and read politics'. Elliot's passion for politics continued at university. He explained that, for the most part, 'It was pretty much rent-a-demo, any demonstration going on I'd go along, like, "What are we doing today?" [laughs].' Elliot's first sexual encounter took place after he had graduated from university and moved overseas. He remembered that a local nurse fifteen years his senior

instigated a summer romance, and 'I went from never having done anything at all, not even kissed anybody, to having sex.'

Elliot's entry into sex work came shortly after he returned to New Zealand in his late twenties. He enrolled in a graduate diploma in history and described life as 'mundane. Just get up in the morning, go to work. Or get up in the morning and look for work. Nothing much ever happened.' His decision to start sex work was a combination of his life 'lacking a spark', and his disillusionment that he had followed his father's advice to work hard to achieve financial security and job satisfaction while acknowledging those plans had not come to fruition. He explained:

> I don't know where the real origin of this was; I thought to myself, I need something that's a bit out there that isn't your nine-to-five mundane thing. Like I said, because at university I never did any wild crazy stuff, and then going to Japan I lived up a mountain, I started to feel frustrated that I hadn't fully lived. I hadn't had my opportunity to go do something unusual. So, I think it was a way of maybe making up for lost time in a sense. So, some of that going on. I think in a negative way, this might sound incredibly Oedipal, but the 'fuck you, Dad' kind of thing. You want me to be respectable, you've pushed this propaganda at me since I was this big that if you work hard, you'll get on, and I've reached this impasse. I've done every course you can think of, I've worked hard, I've done this, I've done that. I've got nothing to show for it, really. Time to try something different. I think on some real subliminal level it was like fuck you, you want me to be conventional, you want me to do the right thing, you want me to play it safe, you want me to do the nine to five, nah. I think there was a bit of that. I don't like to admit to it normally [laughs], but that's a negative impetus for doing it, so there was that. So, the little germ within myself, it wasn't really because of any outside experiences or knowledge, it just started to grow in me.

Elliot's reference to Oedipus, the Greek mythological patricidal figure, is particularly striking. It captures his awareness that sex work is outside of the realm of what his father would have considered respectable and draws on stereotypes that depict sex workers entering the industry due

to negative experiences. Elliot described the process of starting sex work in 2006 as straightforward. He remembered simply purchasing a second cell phone and placing an advertisement in the local newspaper. Selecting his clientele required considerably more thought:

> I'm only really attracted to women, I'm not interested in men at all. My first client was a man so immediately I had to say to myself, You've advertised as casting a wide net, as being able to take a wide range. Can you do it? I didn't know. I didn't know if I could do it. But as I said, how do you answer a what if? You just have to find out if you're capable or not.

His decision to advertise to all, including men, was a combination of acknowledging that most clients were men and he would struggle to make a living otherwise, and his determination to extend his boundaries.

Accepting men as clients also had the benefit of providing a clear separation between Elliot's work and his personal life. He reflected:

> I think one aspect of being straight, for example, and having male clients is there's not a hope in hell of me ever mixing up my personal feelings, or emotions, or the sexual aspect of it, with the work side of it. It is always just going to be work, there's no way I'm going to take an interest in any of them that way. I mean, I'm interested in them as people, you get into some interesting conversations 'cause they confide in you. Because partly what they're paying for is privacy and discretion, all that sort of thing. And they can tell you things they can't tell their friends, or their partners, or their workmates, but they'll tell me stuff. I'm like, 'I didn't say I'm a counsellor, you know' [laughs]. 'I'm a prostitute, not a counsellor' [laughs].

There is an important point to be made about the level of self-protection Elliot is able to establish. The discretion Elliot provided means his services extended beyond the physical and emotional release from sex, and to one where clients discussed intimate topics they could not disclose elsewhere. Yet having clients unburden themselves is a particularly emotionally taxing and unseen aspect of the job:

> It is difficult sometimes when you carry around this stuff in your head. But I realised I'm quite good at demarcating, or compartmentalising is a better way of putting it. For example, I'll have a client here, and they go. If you asked me to identify them in a police line-up ten minutes later, I couldn't tell you what they looked like. I think it's part of being professional in doing this.

Elliot's testimony hints at the cost of having the barriers between himself and clients become unclear. He foreshadowed this topic earlier in the interview, stating, 'You do get some regulars that you've seen for a long time that you kind of do like. And you've got to be careful. I can tell you some stories about where I've crossed the line a little bit there.' When we returned to this discussion later in the interview, he described a particularly difficult encounter with a couple he had as clients:

> I had a regular couple who were coming to see me for a long time. And I liked them, I couldn't help but like them. And I don't know whether it's because there was a woman involved rather than just a man, which given my own orientation it would have been much easier not to take any interest. But I just sort of liked them somehow. And I let them stay longer than I should've, and I started to socialise with them a bit, go out for drinks and stuff like that. And I realised, Ooh, you shouldn't be doing this. And it came to a head at one point when I had an outcall at their house, and the husband tricked me, basically, and didn't pay me and then slammed the door. And I thought that was kind of funny on his part. And I felt like an idiot because I'd opened up a bit. Not in the sense of telling them anything personal about me, they still only knew me by my working name and all the rest of it. But I just thought, Oh you know, you were extra nice to these people, and then that's what happens. So occasionally, when I have done that, I've paid for it a bit I suppose. It makes you realise you design these rules for a good reason.

Offering emotional support also carried safety risks. Elliot explained, 'I've had clients fall in love with me and stuff like that or become obsessed with me. And that's been awkward.'

As the oral histories show, any attempt to gain a 'standard' profile of sex workers will fall short because of the complexity of the individual experience. Public portrayals of sex workers that, as criminologists have noted, reduce them to problematic tropes are often in direct contrast to how people remember their experiences in the industry. Importantly, being involved in sex work did not mean rejecting other parts of their identities. This was even the case for those involved in movements – like radical lesbian feminism – that are often depicted as at odds with sex work. Readers familiar with histories of labour will likely find clear parallels between narrators' memories of working in the sex industry, and the stories people share about being involved in other forms of employment. For some, it was simply a way to earn money; for others, the work held much more significant meanings and became part of their identities. A sex workers' rights approach to research, which recognises the validity of sex work and the agency of those who engage in the work as an occupation, offers space to engage with narrators' meaningful reflections of their time in the industry.

Conclusion

As I was nearing the end of this project in March 2024, I circulated each chapter of the manuscript to the twenty-five people who had shared their stories in oral history interviews. It was an opportunity for us to correct details or to discuss any necessary amendments. Interviewees' responses to the chapters ranged from ones of great enthusiasm at reading their words, my analysis, and reflections from people they recognised, to brief emails that confirmed they were happy to proceed. A few narrators corrected dates or offered further information. For one interviewee who 'had forgotten I had done a brief interview with you', reading the chapter meant 'memories came flooding back, meeting you at Auckland University, that cold, wet night'.[1] I was especially humbled and moved by the response I received from another interviewee, Jeanie, whose involvement in sex work and radical lesbian feminist communities featured in Chapter Eight. She wrote: 'You have represented me very well and in fact given me insights about myself in relation to a wider culture and history that as a 21-year-old I could not have articulated so clearly. . . . Your placing it in context takes away any lingering feelings of doubt or shame about sex work.'[2]

Jeanie's response spoke to one of my deepest hopes as to what this book might achieve. Oral historians offer new ways of viewing the past by unpacking and then relaying the wider historical contexts in which individuals' testimonies are situated, tracing connections and disparities with other interviewees, and examining how narrators' present situations shape their recollections of their experiences. As Jeanie's reflections illustrate, doing so can offer a space for narrators to reflect on and revisit

their memories and interpretations of these histories, and perhaps find new meaning in past events.

In examining the history of sex work, I aimed to make three distinct contributions to historical scholarship. Firstly, this book concludes that increasingly open discussions about sex and sexuality during the course of the late twentieth century did not always lead to greater public tolerance for sex work, but rather affected individuals' lives in complex and contradictory ways. Further, the progression in social attitudes towards sex work was the result of the efforts – both seen and unseen – of individual sex workers dedicated to fighting for their safety and for sex work to be recognised as a legitimate and decriminalised profession. Sex workers brought attention to the implicit racism and sexism in the law that meant trans workers, especially Māori and Pacific individuals, were disproportionately punished, and which placed all workers at the mercy of police, managers, clients and the wider public. The impact of their advocacy extended beyond the sex industry. They brought further attention to individuals' body autonomy decades before covert condom removal during sex was recognised by the public, let alone in court, as a crime of rape. As gay activists had been doing since the early 1980s, many sex workers mobilised to save lives by promoting safe sex and making condoms available at a time when many New Zealanders found them too expensive and embarrassing to purchase. In doing so, they did not passively benefit from more relaxed public attitudes towards sex during this period, but rather played a key role in reshaping how people in Aotearoa thought and spoke about sex and sexuality.

Secondly, this book reclaims and gives precedence to the voices and experiences of sex workers in these decades, which have tended to be overshadowed by the narrative of New Zealand as a liberal nation and a frontrunner in the recognition of sex workers' rights. The position of Aotearoa as the first country in the world to decriminalise sex work potentially silenced important questions about how individual sex workers might mediate and articulate memories in ways that disturb the progressive narrative. This is part of a wider tendency within New Zealand culture to emphasise egalitarianism and social liberalism, and brush over evidence against it, such as the fact that the country has one of the highest rates of domestic violence in the Western world. By seeking the voices of those who supposedly benefit from New Zealand's progressiveness, and attending to their experiences of gender violence and racism as patterns of social

behaviour rather than isolated incidents bucking the progressive national trend, historians offer deeper insight into the complexities of our past.

Finally, these oral histories reveal the richness and diversity in how individuals experienced the industry. Participants ranged from those who inadvertently started sex work as adolescents, to those who very deliberately pursued careers as sex workers. While some of the people in this book worked for short periods to meet personal or financial goals, with varying levels of success, others' tenure spanned several decades. Some found their community among other sex workers, while others worked alone. Their oral histories offer deeper and more nuanced insights into the richness and diversity in their experiences.

After the Act

In June 2018, Catherine Healy was appointed a Dame Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to the rights of sex workers. The awards honour those who have made outstanding contributions to the country and are granted only after being approved by the prime minister, the New Zealand governor-general, and the monarch. Dame Catherine identified her award as 'recognition for us all. It's like: "You guys matter. You can come into the fold."'[3] She was the first sex worker in the world to be recognised in the annual Queen's Birthday Honours, but she was not alone for long. The following week, New South Wales activist Julie Bates became an officer of the Order of Australia for her work campaigning for sex workers' rights and HIV and AIDS prevention. The awards paid due respect to two prominent women who have spent over three decades leading the fight for the rights of sex workers in Australasia. They also signalled changing public views on the sex industry.

It has been over twenty years since New Zealand became the first country in the world to decriminalise sex work. In the intervening years, multiple comprehensive reviews of law reform, peer-reviewed academic research, and personal testimonies from sex workers conclude that decriminalisation has been overwhelmingly successful.[4] In May 2008, the Prostitution Law Review Committee released its final report on the Prostitution Reform Act. The committee – comprising a self-confessed 'unlikely combination' of eleven members ranging from sex worker representatives and government ministers to a retired police officer and a nun, among others – was established under Section 4 of the Prostitution

Reform Act 2003, which mandated a formal review of the law within the first five years of its passage.[5] It was tasked with assessing whether the law had impacted the number of sex workers, and the support that was available to help people avoid or leave the industry, and also with identifying whether further amendments to the law were necessary. The committee's focus on the number of sex workers was especially significant given that the absence of a formal evaluation of decriminalisation in New South Wales in 1995 had 'enabled bizarre lies to be told'.[6] These lies included the allegation that law reform in the state had led to an exponential increase in the number of sex workers. Opponents had used such allegations to argue against decriminalisation in Aotearoa.[7] The committee's final report countered such claims and concluded that the law had little impact on the number of people in the sex industry.[8]

The impact of the law is perhaps most evident in the transformed relationships between sex workers and the police. In October 2022, the NZPC and New Zealand Police collaborated to produce a guide for sex workers who have been sexually assaulted. The booklet, titled 'What to Do', offered practical guidance on making a complaint, and emphasised the police's legal obligations under the Victims' Rights Act 2022 to treat complainants with courtesy and compassion, to respect their privacy, and to keep them informed of the progress of the investigation. Many sex workers have attested to their relationships with police improving in other ways.[9] In July 2014, police in South Auckland escorted a man to an ATM to withdraw money he owed, but had initially refused to pay, to a street-based worker. Such situations were reportedly 'routine'.[10] This is not to suggest that decriminalisation alleviated all issues with police, but it has offered a more conducive environment to foster collaboration and support, and address grievances.[11] Some trans sex workers, in particular, reported facing transphobia and anti-sex-work prejudice from police both before and after decriminalisation, and did not feel comfortable approaching police for help.[12] Alternatively, in Wellington, some trans workers initiated a meeting at the NZPC drop-in centre with police after having bottles thrown at them by tenants in inner-city apartments. Police at the meeting emphasised their support for the workers and discussed ways to protect them by patrolling the area without causing disruption to their work.[13]

Decriminalisation has also helped to remedy some of the power imbalances between sex workers and their managers. The law change means sex workers are protected under employment legislation and have

successfully sought compensation from employers for sexual harassment, unfair dismissal, or withheld payments.[14] In the wake of decriminalisation, sex workers have reported feeling more confident refusing clients and asserting their rights with management. For the people in this book who have worked post-decriminalisation, the law change has also allowed them to operate their businesses under their real names, like people in other industries.

The lessons of history

'Theoretically, it's just as valid a job as anything else.' Elliot had been working as a private escort in a North Island town for thirteen years by the time we met for the interview in November 2019. Elliot's career in the sex industry has kept his life exciting and provided him with a steady income, but 'it's never been purely about the money, of course. I mean, I'm not getting rich [laughs].' Despite the sixteen years that had passed between decriminalisation and our interview, he attested to the prevailing prejudice that continued to marginalise those working in the industry: 'There seems to be a disjuncture between the progressiveness of the law and the grassroots reality of what people think out there.' He continued:

> If it is just another job like everything else, why is it that you can't just go, 'Oh hi, nice to meet you. What do you do?' 'Oh, I'm a prostitute.' 'Oh, are you? That's nice.' You've still got to be guarded, you've still got to choose carefully who you confide in about stuff, you've still got to come up against stereotypes and misunderstandings.

Several interviewees shared similar frustration at encountering negative stereotypes that undermined the intelligence and integrity of people who work in the sex industry. The prejudice attached to sex work means workers are often forced to hide their occupations to protect themselves from others' negative reactions.[15] Trans street-based workers have, in particular, continued to be violently harassed by members of the public.[16] Further, anti-sex-work radical feminists and academics have continued to construe sex workers as victims in need of saving.[17] As the interviewees have revealed, such demeaning depictions are usually in direct opposition to how people reflect on their time in the industry. Reclaiming the right of sex workers to define themselves and the nature of their work has been a key goal of this book.

The oral histories offer new insights into evolving understandings of sex and sex workers' rights through the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. They elevate the perspectives of those who led and experienced these social and legislative changes first-hand. In this way, the history of sex work can offer guidance for the future of sex work. Sex workers have been at the forefront of identifying and fighting for their rights. They have asserted their roles as experts in educating researchers, politicians, health professionals and the wider public, and have proven themselves to be knowledgeable, engaged, and prepared to fight for what is best for their communities. Sex workers were correct when they argued that decriminalisation would protect the rights of those in the industry. Law reform improved sex workers' health and safety by removing criminal sanctions and offering sex workers the same rights and protections as individuals working in other industries. At the time of writing, activists are campaigning to repeal Section 19 of the Prostitution Reform Act, which prohibits people on temporary visas from working in the industry and makes them more vulnerable to exploitation.[18] The NZPC also proposes amending the Human Rights Act 1993 to outlaw discrimination on the grounds of 'being, or having been, a sex worker' to challenge prejudice and ensure sex workers are supported like citizens in other industries.[19] When sex workers tell lawmakers and the public what would be best for the community, they are making recommendations that have been carefully considered and informed by their discussions with the wider community. Of course, sex workers are not a homogenous population and will have differing views and priorities. Their stories are diverse, political, and complicate the story of sex work in productive and significant ways. The important point is that the voices of sex workers are at the heart of this book, and their voices should be at the heart of making decisions that impact their lives.

AFTERWORD

Writing a History of Sex Work

From the beginning of the international sex workers' rights movement in the early 1970s, sex worker activists fought for recognition and established themselves as partners in all aspects of policymaking, legislation and research, employing the mantra 'nothing about us, without us'.[1] In the intervening decades, sex workers have published memoirs; authored and co-authored scholarly books, book chapters and journal articles; completed postgraduate dissertations on sex work; and acted as research advisors and interviewers for others' projects. They have given voice to an experience that can be understood only through their words.[2] These accounts have been the foundation of Jan Jordan's pioneering collection, *Working Girls: Women in the New Zealand Sex Industry Talk to Jan Jordan* (1991), and oral historian Caren Wilton's moving book *My Body, My Business: New Zealand Sex Workers in an Era of Change* (2018). These authors' engagement with the voices of sex workers marks a clear departure from other texts that, as Wilton argues, 'presum[e] to speak on behalf of sex workers, sometimes in inaccurate or slanted ways or with unhelpful agendas'.[3] The growing literature written about or by sex workers speaks to the value they place in going on record.[4] They have shared their stories to advance understandings of sex work and to campaign for social change.[5] The resulting publications also demonstrate how sex workers have set a strong precedent for collaboration and consultation in research.

I approached this project as an oral historian interested in how individuals remembered and made sense of their experiences in New Zealand's sex industry across the late twentieth century, and the connections to broader social and political shifts that were underway at that time. This book reflects a balance between the interviewees' voices and my voice as the researcher. As other oral historians in New Zealand and elsewhere are identifying, historians act as witnesses to interviewees' narratives and not as the experts who interpret and analyse the testimonies without the input of those involved. Rather, narrators produce the accounts with 'their own layers of personal interpretation and historical meaning'.[6] I contextualised the interviews with a close reading of over five hundred articles published in mainstream newspapers, nearly three decades of community magazines, and personal correspondence from the NZPC's private collection and at the National Library.

Oral historians are attuned to the risk that stories they record might be taken and exploited for other purposes that cause harm to the interviewees. Historian and author Melissa Matutina Williams describes this issue particularly powerfully in the context of Māori oral histories. She argues that empowering stories can also be disempowering when used by others to perpetuate negative stereotypes or to determine what is best for Māori communities.[7] Sex worker activists, especially internationally, have raised concerns that opponents who wish to abolish sex work – known as abolitionists, or neo-abolitionists who aim to do so by criminalising clients – would use narrators' adverse experiences to undermine the legitimacy of the industry and the agency of those who work in it.[8] The stakes are particularly high when considering how these stories can be manipulated and used against sex workers to lobby for laws that punish them or their clients. Sex workers should certainly be able to openly discuss their experiences without the fear that their words would be used against them. I have written this book to engage with the richness, diversity and complexity of their experiences in order to add further depth to the understanding of sex and sex work in New Zealand's recent past. Any attempts to use the interviews to argue for the criminalisation of workers or clients will be in direct opposition to the wishes of those who shared their stories, and to the aim of this book.

The people who feature in this book started sex work before 2008. I conducted interviews with twenty respondents, four of whom also participated in interviews with Caren Wilton for her oral history project *Selling Sex: The New Zealand Sex Industry* between 2009 and 2016.

I recruited participants with the support of the NZPC, through word of mouth, and by posting an advertisement on social media. I conducted the interviews at the NZPC offices in Wellington and in Tauranga, in my office at the University of Auckland, at individuals' homes and, on a couple of occasions, at separate apartments interviewees had rented to conduct their businesses as private escorts. I had previously met four of the interviewees when I was commissioned to conduct oral history interviews for the NZAF (now Burnett Foundation Aotearoa) Oral History Project in 2019. I drew on an additional five interviews from Wilton's valuable project.

In the interest of working in collaboration, I aimed to balance some of the inevitable disparities that occur in oral history interviews by returning abstracts to interviewees for their comments and inviting interviewees to read and review chapters I had written. The narrators' involvement in the project beyond the interview was valuable, but I was conscious of asking too much of their time.[9] As psychology academic Linda Waimarie Nikora has pointed out, an individual's decision to participate in an interview does not mean they wish to be part of other aspects of the project. Nikora urges researchers to be mindful of pressuring interviewees into accepting a role in the research they would prefer not to have.[10] I took the lead from Nikora's research by being open to further participation by inviting interviewees to read and comment on the draft chapters or their extracts, but also making it explicit that I was grateful for the time they had already given me.[11]

I aimed to interview a diverse cohort and managed to include people who started sex work between the ages of thirteen and thirty-four, who grew up in places ranging from Whangārei in Northland to Invercargill in Southland, and who worked in urban cities and regional towns. The duration of their involvement in sex work ranged from six months to over thirty years and counting. One of the areas I did not manage to include was the voices of workers of Asian descent. This was not for want of trying. My interest in these individuals' experiences was both personal and scholarly. Both of my parents immigrated to New Zealand as adults, with my dad arriving from England in the 1960s and my mum from the Philippines in 1985. She was one of the first Filipino women in Rotorua, a town that has since developed a strong Filipino population spanning several generations. I was interested in exploring how sex workers dealt with experiences I understood to be common among migrants from Southeast Asia. These included navigating the language and cultural barriers, sometimes raising young families while establishing themselves in a new country and, importantly, balancing

expectations to financially support families overseas. The voices of Asian workers would add further depth to the highly reported discussions about an influx of migrant workers with the visa waivers of 1987, and concerns about exploitation of these individuals and the barriers they faced in accessing health care, as outlined in Chapter Six. Except for an unpublished gender studies thesis on Thai sex workers in New Zealand and Thailand, a study on the voices of Asian sex workers before decriminalisation is yet to be completed.[12] I hope someone will write this valuable history in the future.

There are a few potential explanations for my struggle to recruit participants of Asian descent. As a historical study, the book focuses on those who started working before or shortly after decriminalisation in 2003. Other interviewees noted that many migrant sex workers arrived on three-month visitors' visas in the 1980s and 1990s. While some remained in New Zealand, most reportedly returned to their home countries before their visas expired. As David Ting's 2018 sociology thesis on migrant Asian sex workers points out, participating in research is a much lower priority for those on short-term visas than earning income.[13] Engaging with the voices of sex workers on temporary visas continues to be difficult under Section 19 of the Prostitution Reform Act 2003 that prohibits these individuals from working in the industry. They risk having their visas cancelled and being deported if they come to the attention of authorities.[14]

Decriminalisation has been an overwhelming success in Aotearoa. Sex workers have reported higher self-esteem, better working conditions and more balanced relationships with the police as a direct result of law reform. Yet decriminalisation is not yet complete. Sex workers on short-term visas are still considered in breach of the law and potentially face all the challenges that come with working in a criminalised environment. As this book demonstrates, these issues include being vulnerable to violence and exploitation with few avenues for redress. Despite twenty years of lobbying by the NZPC and its allies, including migrant sex workers, at the time of writing, Section 19 is yet to be repealed.

Notes

Introduction

1 Sociologists and public health scholars have conducted valuable research in these areas. For a selection of such studies, see Abel, 'A Decade Of Decriminalization', 580–92; Abel et al., 'The Prostitution Reform Act', 75–76; Armstrong, 'Decriminalisation, Policing and Sex Work in New Zealand', 73–88; Armstrong, 'From Law Enforcement to Protection?', 570–88; Armstrong, 'Managing Risks of Violence in Decriminalised Street-Based Sex Work'; Pérez-y-Pérez, '"Doing It with the Lights On"', 139–52; Zangger, 'For Better or Worse?'.

2 Jordan, 'Of Whalers, Diggers and "Soiled Doves"', 37; Jordan, '"On the Clients' Terms"', 22.

Chapter One: Working Outside the Law

1 On the wharf police's violent reputation, see Andrae, 'Submerged', 44.
2 Stanley, *The Road to Hell*, 218.
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4 Wilton, *My Body, My Business*, 21.
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7 Thomson, Massage Parlours Bill, 5061–63.
8 Ibid., 5061.
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12 Armstrong, 'Decriminalisation, Policing and Sex Work in New Zealand', 79.
13 Ibid.
14 Jordan, 'Of Whalers, Diggers and "Soiled Doves"', 37.
15 Police Offences Act 1927, Section 52.
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24 Jordan, unpublished conference paper, 6–8 May 1991, 6.

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29 Abel, 'A Decade of Decriminalization', 584–85; Frances, *Selling Sex*, 259–62; Jakobsen and Perkins, 'Oral History of Sex Workers in Sydney', 55, 58–59.

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35 Te Whaiti and Roguski, *Māori Perceptions of the Police*, 39.

36 Ibid., 2; Ruth Berry, 'Maori Treated Badly at Hands of Police, Says Leaked Report', *Sunday Star-Times*, 17 May 1998, A4; Maxwell and Smith, *Police Perceptions of Maori*.

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